



REALTOR
461-1159

THE DISAPPOINTMENT

100 SO VERY

WAYS REMEMBER
UNDERSTAND.

SCOTT -
I WILL ALWAYS LOVE
AND WATCH OVER YOU.
I WILL ALWAYS BE PROUD
YOU WERE MY SON.
YOU HAVE A GOOD
SUPPORT GROUP USE IT.
PLEASE TRY TO UNDER-
STAND AND HELP A STAY
CLOSE TO DAD. IT'S NO ONE'S FAULT
IT'S THE ONLY MECHAN-
ISM I SEEM TO HAVE

YOU
PORT
LEAS
ND A.
E TO
'S NO
THE
I SI

I'M SORRY YOU HAVE
TO DEAL WITH THIS. PLEASE
TRY TO UNDERSTAND.
DAD WILL NEED YOU.
PLEASE DON'T LET HIM
DOWN. IT SEEMS THE
SUDDENLY, I'M THE
EXPENDABLE ONE.
KNOWING THE END
RESULT - I WOULD HAVE
STILL DONE THE SAME
THING TO HAVE YOU AS
A SON DURING YOUR LIFE.

I'M SORRY
DEAL TO
TO LKNOW
AD OF UNDER
SE PLEASE
I. FORGIVE
D BE THE BEST
CAN BE - I'LL BE



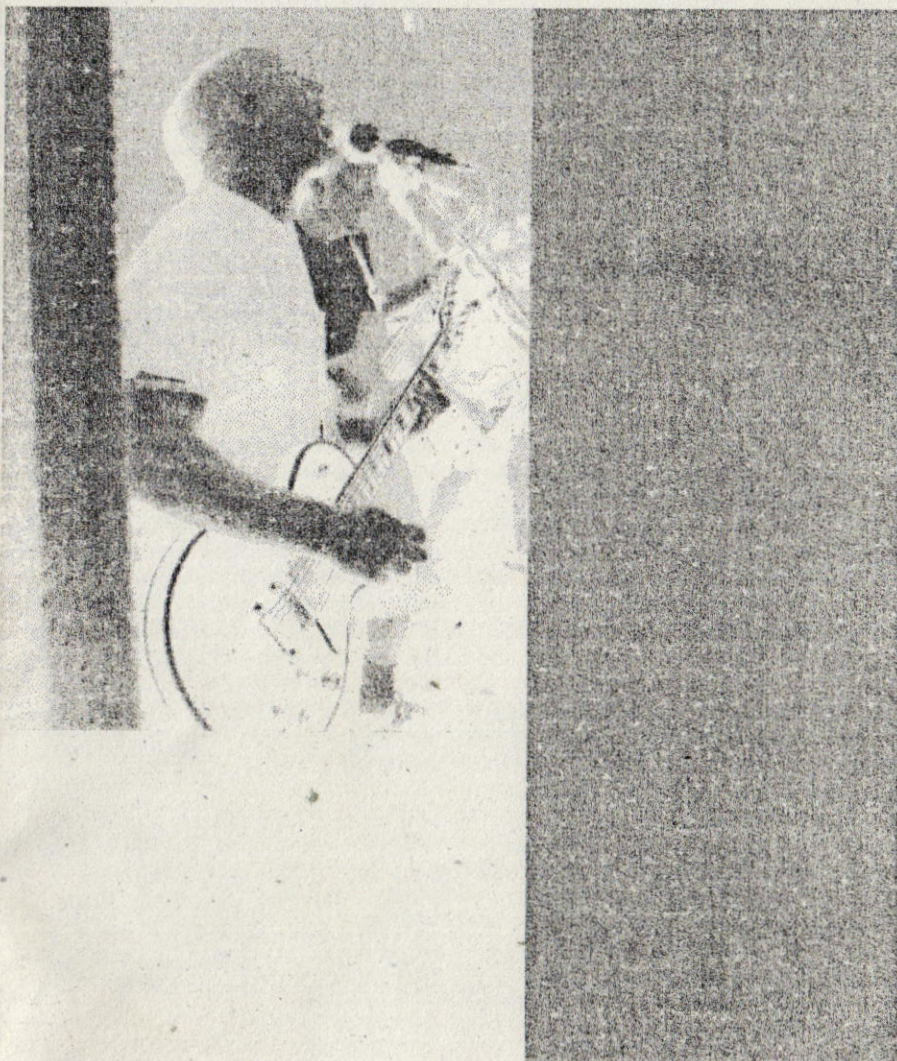
CALL CHRIS & START PACKING

new young faces grow sad and old
and hearts of fire grow cold
we swore blood brothers against the wind
I'm ready to grow young again
Bruce Springsteen

VOLUME 3
ISSUE 1

SICK TO MOVE
FREE

**HOT WATER MUSIC/ELLIOTT
DOWN BY LAW/ESSAYS/HOPE**



WE'D HAVE NOTHING TO HANG OUR HOPES ON (IF IT WEREN'T FOR GALLOWES HUMOR)

I was riding down the highway in a Toyota van when Shimo took my Sharpie and started writing on my hand. It was only fair - I had scrawled Xs on his hands the day before. He drew for a few moments and then asked me if I knew what the characters meant. Of course I didn't - in Japan, I'm completely illiterate. He looked at me and said it means dreamer. And it hit me like a brick between the eyes.

It seemed to sum up everything about me that needs to be said. I dream. I hope. And I don't really have any reason to do either. After all, it's been a hard few years. I won't make the absurd argument that difficult times justify the demise of optimism, but it certainly hasn't been easy to keep it alive. Yet somehow, I manage.

Since the big things that nourish optimism are few and far between, I find sustenance in daily life - everything from the birds outside my window that wake me up in the morning to the songs I hear on the radio. Life is simply too short not to find beauty in our surroundings.

I will never forget a conversation I had with Dave Quinn about this, about four years ago. He and I were standing on Kettner Boulevard near his van. The Velvet was closed for the night and we were talking, staring out over the airport. He told me about a tour he had been on in Colorado when he slept in the back of the van in sub-freezing weather, only to wake up to a sunrise in the Rockies. "Nature never lets you down," he said. He was right then. He still is.

I don't mean that life is sweetness and light. I still get savagely depressed. I still find myself tearing through my record collection at three in the morning, looking for a song that will chase the blues away. I understand on a very personal level what Robert Johnson meant when he sang "Hellhound on my Trail" - evenings like this one, it means there's something behind me, something dark, something I don't want to see. I may run as hard as I can, but sooner or later, I have to stop to rest because I'm exhausted. And it still usually feels like it's gaining on me.

I do the best I can on those nights. I read. I take baths. I turn off the lights and soak in steaming hot water. I write. I usually feel like the words bleed out of me; they must because I hurt too damn much not to be wounded. Despite the graveyard shifts when I don't sleep, I yearn for better days. I remember times when I was happy. And I understand that suffering not only builds character, it is perhaps the best catalyst for revolutionary change.

I don't enjoy these feelings and nights, no matter how productive I may be during these long hours. Typically, my mood gradually progresses from sorrow to bitterness to anger, pausing at appropriate moments to allow for the subtle emotional shadings, changes that seem to be as natural a progression as summer turning to fall, and as logical as shifting from second to third. And as Russell Banks once wrote, "Rage, for better or worse, generates a future."

But here's what really matters at times like this - it's acknowledging these conflicting emotions, reconciling them and slugging through anything in my way. It's knowing that pain is just another way to say that I have to change, and that when I wake up, the sun will still be shining through the eastern window, no matter where I decided to crash.

And that's part of what life is - a Euclidian combination of constants to provide emotional anchors and variables that math teachers couldn't begin to explain, a system of obscure theorems and corollaries written in a dead language with no Rosetta Stone in sight. And like every other asshole with a philosophical bent who wants to write about the Money Concepts, I'm getting the story wrong and leaving most of it out.

I don't think it's any secret to anyone who knows me that I'm rarely satisfied with how things are. I always want more - more volume, hotter food, faster songs, longer sets, more coffee. An ex-girlfriend of mine once told me that I crave intensity, and she's right. Life is too short and I want to burn.

Hazy silver light turns gold on the tarmac, turning luggage carts and water alike into gleaming 24 karat beauty. Fumes shimmer in the setting sun. And this is what I've been waiting for - anticipation and energy enough to chase whatever comes along as far as it can go. Is it strange to look at life's limitless potential and still find it confining? Everything is finite and time often seems like a two-bit cutthroat alley thief, stealing moments and stretching them into years. There is little to be gained by mounting an insurrection against the oppression of end points, but I raise my black flag anyway. It is true that I'm a sucker for lost causes, that I swim against the current, that I run into headwinds, that I believe even walls will give way if I only push hard enough. Time is neither an enemy nor a friend; it is more like an unsympathetic proctor, ensuring that the tests are collected at the end of the allotted hours and that no one cheats - or at least that the foolish get caught.

REVOLUTION BEGINS IN THE MIRROR.

There's been a revolution brewing in my head since I was a kid. Six strings and half as many chords have always been a declaration of independence to me, so much so that I still flail away at my guitar every chance I get, even though I've never gotten any better. I pull the strap over my shoulder and plug in, turn the volume and gain all the way up and try like hell to play something that sounds like the noise I hear in my head when I'm going to sleep or singing to myself. I walk through the streets alone, a ready grin for any friendly face, always searching for something new. Not so long ago, I felt incredibly old - I still joke about it. I felt aged beyond my years and jaded beyond my dreams, disenchanted and disenfranchised. I had forgotten what I loved and what renewed me, what made me feel alive again. I've only just begun to remember, but it seems that my feet are predisposed to dance in celebration because they already know the path that I feel compelled to follow. This is my community, a loose-knit fellowship of like-minded outcasts. This is my home, anywhere that Les Pauls ring out in triumphant rejoicing over everyday life. And this, to me, is freedom. Power chords have always been a clarion call to arms in my life. And my revolution of the moment is all but over. The years of inactivity peeled away and the voice that grew rusty with disuse is screaming again. It was a private revolution, yet a necessary one. I had forsaken what I knew for love; while it may be true that there is no greater sacrifice, it is equally true that there is no sacrifice which makes less sense than exchanging a love that is ultimately life-affirming for one that promises only a growing feeling of discontent and having been cheated in the process. And isn't rage against injustice and raw deals always the cause of revolution? Doesn't hunger foster a spirit of rebellion that lingers until the soul and stomach are full? I thought I was feasting but my emaciated stomach and heart knew the truth - I was wasting away. They rebelled and declared war upon my complacency and in the struggle, I slowly began to wake up. I realized where I had been and what I had been doing and joined in. Now pillars of smoke climb as fires slowly burn out. I can look back and see nothing but scarred earth and ash where battles were fought, and realize that, while this revolution was anything but bloodless and I shall bear the scars for the rest of my natural life, everything turned out for the best. I'm stronger now - stronger still due to the grace and support of my friends, the only family I have left. A fire burns inside me again, a fire I once thought was extinguished forever. I no longer feel like a partisan in my own life; those days are over and the rebels have come down from the hills to join in the celebration, shooting their pistols and drinking from the jugs of wine that we pass around in the spirit of friendship. Revolutions now and again are necessary; the blood they spill provides fertile ground for growth and change. My eyes are wide open again and though I may still be bruised and bloody, I know my heart is strong and I'm exactly where I need to be.

FLY THE FLAG.

NO RETREAT.

So here I stand, nearing the end of all the shit I've gone through over the past few years - unbroken and still defiant. 10 years of learning how to rebel, 1 of being forced into partisanship and 17 more of practice, with plenty of opportunity. I can't remember the last time I didn't go against the grain, that I didn't bet against the odds, knowing I'd get cut. Trying anyway. Nothing worth doing is easy. Even so, I've been lucky. Those 28 years gave me the gift of a burning heart, yearning for better times, that carried me through the worst ones. Hard luck yielded strong friends who are closer than any brothers or sisters ever could be, no matter how many miles are between us. We don't need to see what lies ahead anymore; we just lock arms and move straight on 'til morning.

OPEN LETTER TO NO ONE IN PARTICULAR.

I had stopped at a small coffee counter in the Portland airport for some espresso. I ordered my usual double and the guy behind the counter told me a large usually comes with four. What was I going to do? Turn it down? While he pulled shots, we chatted. I saw a copy of Zinn's "People's History" on the counter behind him and I told him about my visit to the Ludlow Massacre monument. For his part, he told me about the stand's sale to a coffee conglomerate. "It'll be like Starbucks soon enough," he said. "You'll get singles and doubles." Therein lies the value of independence - being free to give four shots of espresso to someone who's about get on a plane and only charge them for two. As it turned out, he told me my drink was on the house. Maybe it was the conversation. Maybe it was my appreciation of the quantity of espresso in the drink. And maybe it was just a middle finger to the new corporate owners. Whatever the reason, I tipped him well and went on my way, burning my mouth with every sip.

NO EQUALIZER.

Life isn't fair. I seem to be running into a substantial number of people lately who think it's supposed to be. It's not fair that their relationship ended, that they have a mean boss, that they don't like how their life is turning out because they were supposed to be successful - whatever the fuck that means - and they feel like they're failing. It just isn't fair. And what every last one of them fails to realize is that unfairness is the point of life. As I've gotten older, I've come to realize the value of fighting for everything, even the lost causes - especially the lost causes. Everyone has been through hard times - some harder than others but all equally trying. In my case, I've buried my family, I've walked away from destructive relationships and not looked back, I've helped friends move to other cities and gone for years without seeing them. It isn't fair, but all the tough breaks made me who I am today, and I feel like I got the best of the deal. I love hard times because they force me to change and take a stand, and I find out who my real friends are when I'm getting the hell kicked out of me. Can I even begin to explain what a gift that is? In three years of stripping away family, friends and lovers, I've had no choice but to figure who I am and what I do, what's important to me and what I can do without. I've spent weeks alone, not really talking to anyone. I've lived like a monk, getting my head straight and getting ready for what comes next. I don't wake up in the morning and wonder who I am or what I want anymore. I don't wonder why I'm doing what I'm doing. After everything I've been through, I wake up in the morning and jump out of bed, ready to move, ready to burn. I wake up hoping that life decides to put obstacles in my way because I know I can go around them, over them, under them or straight through them and nothing will stop me. Hard times harden muscles, sharpen minds and yield warmer hearts. Hard times make us stronger and, if we hold true to our ideals, better people. Frankly, I don't want it any other way.

SICK TO MOVE

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1, JUNE 2000
NO RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY ... EVER.

JOURNALIST NECK
SCOTT PUCKETT

THE WHISKEY REBELS
PHILIP DAWDY, TOM PARKER,
DAVE QUINN, ALEX THIESEN

MADE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF:

THE DRAGONS. VAN MORRISON. THE CLASH. FACE TO FACE. TEXAS IS THE REASON. CHAVEZ. FUEL. DOWN BY LAW. DAG NASTY. LIFETIME. LEATHERFACE. SCREAMING FAT RAI. THE URCHIN. JEJUNE. AVAIL. ANN BERETTA. GRADE. AMERICAN HEARTBREAK. DIRE STRAITS. HOT WATER MUSIC. AMERICAN STEEL. THE GET UP KIDS. IN MY EYES. KNAPSACK. PEGBOY. THE BAND. SAVES THE DAY. THE WEAKERTHANS. CAPTURE THE FLAG. ELLIOTT FURIOUS IV. BULLET LAVOLTA. HÜSKER DÜ. WESTON. SEAN. ELVIS COSTELLO. NAKED RAYGUN. SOUL ASYLUM. BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN. THE 65 FILM SHOW. FUGAZI. MINOR THREAT. THE REPLACEMENTS. DILLINGER FOUR. THE MALAKAS. KID DYNAMITE. ONE LAST WISH. FASTBREAK.

SUGGESTED READING:

"A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES," HOWARD ZINN; "MINIMA MORALIA," THEODOR ADORNO; "THE REVOLUTION OF EVERYDAY LIFE," RAOUL VANEIGEM; "COMMUNIFY YOUR DISSENT," THOMAS FRANK AND MATT WEILAND, EDS.; "IN DUBIOUS BATTLE," JOHN STEINBECK; "THE END OF THE AFFAIR," GRAHAM GREENE; "SHAMBHALA: THE SACRED PATH OF THE WARRIOR," CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA

THANKS TO:

DAVE, ROSS AND BOB. BART. ALEX. PHILIP THERON. THE DRAGONS. WATER CLOSET. ZERO FAST. OVAL. FURIOUS IV. NO KNIFE. THE DISGUSTEENS. MANDY. G.B. KARI. TOM. DAWNE. ANNA. ELISABETH. KRISTEN. ELLEN. A.C. DONNA. MARIA. HOT WATER MUSIC. ELLIOTT. PAT. SHERRI. CANDY. JOHN. KOUJI. CARY. DAVE. JARET. ERIN. MIKE. YUTAKA. KOMATA. YOSHI. KALI. KATHY AND ANDRE. SALLY. ELLEN. JEN. ANDY TOMSKY. DAVE SMALLEY. EVERYONE WHO HELPED. AND ANYONE I MAY HAVE FORGOTTEN.

EMAIL: PUCKETT@CRASH.CTS.COM
MAIL: P.O. BOX 121462
SAN DIEGO, CA 92112-1462
WEB: HTTP://WWW.PUNKROCKACADEMY.COM

THE ONLY ISSUES OF STM THAT ARE CURRENTLY IN PRINT ARE 3.0 AND 3.1. I DO NOT HAVE ANY BACK ISSUES, NOR DO I PLAN TO REPRINT OLDER ISSUES. YOU CAN ACCESS THE OLDER ISSUES THROUGH THE WEB SITE.

CONTENTS:

INTERVIEWS:

HOT WATER MUSIC
ELLIOTT
DOWN BY LAW

ESSAYS:

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN - PARKER
RADIO RAGGA - PUCKETT

ANTARCTICA STARTS HERE.

WORDS TO REMEMBER

"WE'RE A LUKEWARM PEOPLE FOR ALL OUR FEAST DAYS AND HARD WORK. NOT MUCH TOUCHES US, BUT WE LONG TO BE TOUCHED. WE LIE AWAKE AT NIGHT WILLING THE DARKNESS TO PART AND SHOW US A VISION. OUR CHILDREN FRIGHTEN US IN THEIR INTIMACY, BUT WE MAKE SURE THEY GROW UP LIKE US. LUKEWARM LIKE US. ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS, HANDS AND FACES HOT, WE CAN BELIEVE THAT TOMORROW WILL SHOW US ANGELS IN JARS AND THAT THE WELL-KNOWN WOODS WILL SUDDENLY REVEAL ANOTHER PATH." JEANETTE WINTERSON

"THE ONLY REVOLUTION THAT INTERESTS ME IS ONE THAT WILL GIVE MORE PEOPLE MORE COMPREHENSION OF THEIR HUMAN POSSIBILITIES AND THEIR HUMAN OBLIGATIONS." WALLACE STEGNER

"SITTING HERE WAITING, I GOT TO KNOW MY POWER. I'M STRONGER THAN YOU, MAC. I'M STRONGER THAN ANYTHING IN THE WORLD, BECAUSE I'M GOING IN A STRAIGHT LINE." JOHN STEINBECK

"BELIEVE ME, WHEN I GET TO THROWING BOMBS, I'LL DO DAMAGE. THERE'LL BE MORE THAN SMOKE IN MY PETARDS." JACK LONDON

"YOU CAN'T JUST SCREAM AND HOLLER ALL YOUR LIFE. YOU HAVE TO STEP BACK A MINUTE, LOOK AT YOURSELF AND SAY, 'YEAH, I AM FUCKED.' AND TRY TO CHANGE IT." BOB MOULD



HOT WATER MUSIC

I interviewed guitarist Chris Wollard of Hot Water Music before an amazing show with Elliott. HWM's music, like Avail's songs, made me realize that punk still makes me feel something that I can't describe. Talking to Chris only cemented that belief. I don't put any faith in horoscopes, but I've saved mine from the next day because it summarized how I feel about the interview in a lot of ways: "The spiritual arena takes precedence after yesterday's main event. Recapture the sacredness in everyday routines and rituals. Don't take loved ones for granted."

One of the first things I wanted to ask you about was the Pegboy sticker in the photo that's in the liner notes to "Finding the Rhythms." Are you guys big Pegboy fans?

Chris: It's kind of hard not to be, right? They're a great band and Naked Raygun was a great band. We got to play with them a long time ago. They're great guys, very cool, and very down for hanging out. They're very friendly people. I've only seen them once and Larry accidentally punched me in the nose.

Chris: So you're not a big fan. Oh, I'm a huge fan. I bought him a shot afterward to say thanks. Anyway, I first got into you guys through the Leatherface split and then got everything I could find. The thing that really grabbed me about the music was this sense of optimism that runs through all the songs.

Chris: I don't think it's necessarily anything we really try to put into our music. It's just the way we try to live. We always try to find the good in a situation. We try to find our way through it, so obviously that's what

would come out in a song, you know, trying to find what will save us. Take "Our Own Way." I thought about my life and nights when I was walking home alone and singing to myself and it reminded me of times when singing along seemed like the only thing that would keep me going.

Chris: It's actually a song about me and my old lady. It's a song about us two. It's not really a song about being alone. It's about not paying attention to the rest of the world. It's about living our lives together, the way that we want to, and fuck everybody. Let it roll right off you. That's what that's about, but I know what you're saying. It sounds similar to what I get from other songs because it sounds like they're about a really tight community.

Chris: Yeah, it is. That's the way our band works. We won't do this band unless we're all good friends. That's the way we live. We have a family and it's a very big family, like Leatherface, Ann Beretta, Avail. These are our friends, these are our brothers, these are our sisters and this is the way we live. I mean, we're

So I thought that was where it ended - at the Belly Up Tavern, an over-priced watering hole for middle-aged surf yuppies, listening to Megadeth's last good album, waiting to see Down By Law. Considering how integral Down By Law had been to the zine, it was only fitting, even though it wasn't the place for them and it certainly wasn't the place for me. I have about as much to do with bars that have hardwood floors as I do with mirrored balls. Not my scene. I had gone to dinner with Dave and Keith earlier; we talked a bit and caught up on old times, then discussed the new ones. It was their last show of the tour and, I thought, the last time I would see them before the zine came to its close. Even then, I knew there was something wrong about ending it like that. I knew that drawing STM to a close at a venue where no one felt at home and a show that none of us belonged at would have given the lie to everything it meant to me and everything I stood for. DBL belonged at an all-ages venue and I had hated the Belly Up for years, hated the small-minded attitudes and posturing and nostalgia for bands that its patrons didn't pay attention to in the first place. And so I waited, half listening to the bad metal they played to cater to the "punks." I waited for the sound of real punk rock to come storming through the speakers and replace the bullshit that found fertile ground in unquestioning ears. I waited to hear the chords in which I always found myself made anew. Most of the people there went to see the Buzzcocks, to hear "Orgasm Addict." I went to see one band and waited at the metal security railing, knowing that I'd go home with a bruised rib cage and pulled muscles, a sore neck and ringing ears. I waited, knowing that when DBL took the stage, I would start dancing. I'd start singing like I wrote the words because art doesn't exist in a vacuum. Art is only real when other people see it or hear it or touch it - when they feel it like a hard punch to the gut that knocks the wind out of them. Their reaction expands its meaning. In other words, when we sing along, even if and especially if we can't sing, we make that song ours. Consider it a gift. We all give music our own meaning. I used to get angry when songwriters wouldn't discuss explicit meanings; now I thank them for it. These songs belong to the band and me and you. They have crossed the boundary from "theirs" to "ours." And this is the greatest degree of honesty I'm capable of, admitting that I've been wrong in my approach to music for years, because when DBL played "Independence Day," the song took on entirely new meanings as I screamed along - "Don't worry about me mom and dad/ 'Cause I'll be okay." They are meanings that I'm sure Dave Smalley didn't intend, but that came through loud and clear to me and raised my heart like a fucking black flag of rebellion and resistance at a time when it felt too heavy to ever pick up again.

WE KNOW THE NIGHT

I crave connection, getting into a conversation with someone I don't know so I can learn new things and exchange ideas, or maybe discover a reflection of my own thoughts and dreams. When I was in Sendai, I wound up talking with a punk named Yutaka. We drank beer for hours and talked about The Replacements, but we were really talking about our lives through talking about the 'Mats. We talked about why we like them - the way they articulate loneliness, confusion and being totally clueless about girls - the inference being that we are lonely and confused. I can only presume that he didn't have a girlfriend either because when the clear gray light of dawn broke, we were still sitting on the sidewalk, drinking beer and talking. I felt connected that night. We shouted out "Bastards of Young" and "Alex Chilton," we sang "Waitress in the Sky" and "Talent Show" and I felt like I had found another brother in arms. Same problems. Same solutions. Same goddamn sorrows to drink away.

NO HAS BEENS.

ANTARCTICA STARTS HERE.

Driving through Portland - sitting in traffic, more to the point, Lee Morgan on the radio and the sun shining down on me. Morgan fades to shuffling hip hop beats, my tongue still stings from an espresso burn. I'm completely wired, ideas scorching through my head like silver contrails of light and words bursting like fireworks in my cortex, and almost in tears from the beauty of it all as my heart swells with wonder. I'm coming home with Howard Zinn and Nelson Algren, an allergy attack and a belly full of caffeine. I won't sleep for hours, but I've got a pen and paper and books that can change my life in the passenger seat. As I was walking around downtown just now, I realized that every shitty thing that ever happened to me has had one result, and the same one - eventually - each time. It has made my heart grow larger, just wide enough to take in a little more pain and feel compassion for the person who caused it, just wide enough to listen to people who are hurting and offer some compassion and empathy. The blues can only have two effects - they either harden a person and turn them bitter and cold, or make a person that much more sympathetic and kind. One way in ... two ways out. And only one of them worth taking.

TURN ON THE GODDAMN HEATER IF YOU HAVE COLD FEEL

I just celebrated ex day. I don't anticipate celebrating it again; at least, not on the same day. In fact, I don't want to celebrate it again, but if I ever do, it will fall on a different day and for different reasons. This year, it happened to coincide with Memorial Day; frankly, it doesn't really deserve that kind of significance. Ex day is a name I gave to a day of remembrance. It's just my way of putting the past in its place and letting it be, of walking away from a weight that I've carried for too long as it is, and the nature of the burden should be evident from the name. I celebrated ex day at the beach with a letter that I never intended for her to see and a book of matches. I wished her luck and happiness in my uneven handwriting, put it in an envelope with the last remaining picture that I had of her, and held a flame to it until it caught fire. I watched the envelope and its contents burn, curl into ash and drift into the wind. As the last embers burned out, a single seagull flew out of the darkness and into the light of the sodium lamps, wheeled once and disappeared again.

THIS IS WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT LOVE.

For days, I have been enjoying the confidence that accrues only to the foolhardy, the drunk and the insane, yet I am as sober as I can be, save for excessive (for most people) amounts of coffee. My heart is open and, as Dave Quinn says, I'm an emo pussy. My heart is on my sleeve; I couldn't have it any other way. And isn't a heart better to wear in that location than a handkerchief? Is it better to joust like Don Quixote or a knight of the Round Table? For my lot, I'll take windmills and a broken down mule over lust and cloth. I'll take friendship over fleeting intimacy, no matter how foolish the plots and goals of friends may prove to be. Those plans yield a fresh crop of hope, no matter how unrealistic or distant it may be; reaping such a harvest is far more rewarding than any number of nights filled with tender sighs and moistened lips. Love all too frequently ends in betrayal and suffering, while attacking palm trees that made snide comments in passing results in laughter, even years later. Everyone needs a Sancho Panza; the same cannot be said for Guinevere.

on the road for half the year, at least. These are the people we live with. These are the people we rely on to help us out. That is totally it and that's what I'm saying. We don't really try to put anything through the songs except for our everyday philosophies and our everyday lives. That's what it is. It's our family. We are our family and optimism is the way we try and look at things. We try not to get down and depressed about everything. We try to find the way out.

Yeah, and there's something else. Your songs seem political, but only in the sense that they're personal politics. It's not like you're singing "Fuck the government."

Chris: Yeah, it's our personal politics. We write about what pisses us off and we write about what we love and sometimes that gets into politics and sometimes it has nothing to do with it, but that's totally what it is. It's our personal philosophies. This is our image of our life.

I'm really glad to hear you talking about bands like Ann Beretta and Avail. Ann Beretta's "Bitter Tongues" still blows me away.

Chris: They're a great band. We've known them for a while, from when they were in Inquisition, and they're a great fucking band. I just heard their new stuff and it's awesome. They just did a couple of new songs for some comps. They just keep getting better and better. They're a great band.

Going back to your friendship as a band, I had heard that Hot Water Music actually broke up for a few months.

Chris: Yeah, we broke up and that's why we broke up. We went on the road for too long. I mean, we were gone for 8 months, 8 1/2 months, something like that, on and off. We lost our home lives and we were just getting really irritable and bitter. After that long, you kind of start getting sick of people and when a problem comes up, you don't really want to talk to these people about it because you see them every day and you just want to get away and deal with your problems and you can't do that. We started fighting a lot, arguing all the time. We were getting up onstage and singing about everything we were just talking about, but we'd get done and we'd be arguing and not happy and not living what we were singing about. So we were like, "This is bullshit. This is total bullshit for us to get up there and pretend anything. So fuck this. It's over." **So you broke up instead of being hypocrites.**

Chris: Yeah. We were like, "I don't want to sing songs that I'm not sure we all are behind." So we totally broke up. We finished the tour - we were in Europe, we had to finish the tour - so we just finished that, cancelled everything else, came back home and we didn't talk to each other for like three months. We had one final show. We started practicing for that and hanging out. We all had done a lot of soul-searching and got happier with ourselves so that when we saw each other, we were getting along again. We all understood each other, we all understood our place and it just seemed kind of obvious that we were ready to be a band again. **It almost sounds like you split up so you could stay friends.**

Chris: Yeah, that's the thing. This band started as a friendship and it's not going to continue if it's not a friendship. That's totally what it is. We had to keep being friends and we knew that if we kept being a band, we would end up hating each other forever. So we were like, "Fuck this." It's not that important, you know? It's really not that important. It's not more important than our friendship, so we cut it off.

All of this stuff seems tied together and this seems to tie back into the lyrics. To me at least, it seems like a lot of your lyrics are more old school - there's a lot more about unity and changing yourself and keeping yourself strong so you can change the world.

Chris: Well, that's what we grew up with. I mean, it's not necessarily what we're trying to do. We're just singing the words that we know in the way that we know how to say them. We're not trying to sugarcoat anything or act tough or angry, or anything. We're just singing what we feel like singing, what makes sense, what helps us out. And it does all tie together because it's all about our lives. Every song is a different aspect of our lives. It's a storyboard of the last five years. It definitely ties together. We got from song to song because of the song before it. It's a story. It's all linked together. It might sound, lyrically, like it's a little older. I don't know. They're just the words that make sense, I think, to the ideas.

It seems like you're just suggesting that people keep their minds and eyes and hearts open.

Chris: Yeah. I don't think I should be telling anybody to do what I do or anything. Do what makes you happy. Do what's good for you. Follow your path and find what you are, find what makes you happy, find your place.



In contrast, the music is really complex. It sounds like you change time signatures a lot; this isn't just 4/4 stuff.

Chris: Yeah. Jason and George grew up playing jazz together. That's how they know each other, so we use that as a foundation for everything. What's the point of writing a record that we've already written? We always try to challenge ourselves. We always try. Maybe it's not mindblowing and maybe it doesn't open any new doors. It's all been done before, definitely, but we're trying to challenge ourselves to do what works for us and keep it interesting for us, you know, keep it real and keep it urgent. We don't play any songs that we're lyrically or musically bored with. They're all gone. We don't ever play them anymore. If it doesn't mean anything anymore, then we don't play it. We're always trying to move forward. We're always trying to go through what's new, what's urgent now.

And you keep getting better as you keep doing it because you get more practice. So there's a background in jazz; it also sounds like there's one in old school punk.

Chris: Yeah, me and Chuck are just rock 'n' roll punk rock guitar players. It's weird. It's a very strange thing sometimes, just this straightforward stuff up front and these fucking jazz guys tearing it up behind us. It's definitely cool to be able to play with different people like that.

I'm starting to understand why I like you guys, because about all I've been into recently is bebop jazz and old school punk. How do you go about putting those styles together?

Chris: It used to be like a typical band - well, it wasn't too typical because everyone was writing songs - but somebody would bring in a complete song and then the band would make it their own. Now, we don't even try that. We really don't even let each other do

that. Now we go to practice 5 days a week, 3 or 4 hours at a time, and just jam. We just all let each other do our own things. Nobody is telling anybody "This is the guitar part," or "This is the beat." It's "This is an idea, why don't we just fuck around with it and see if it goes anywhere." If it does, we just keep pounding it and we'll do it for months, changing these songs over and over. We demo them and listen to the demo, and keep in mind this is all without vocals, and we just keep evolving the songs and anything that doesn't explode in our faces, we toss out immediately. We don't even want to deal with it. That's how we do it now. We all just talk and say, "Where do we want to go with this, what are we all thinking for this song?" Sometimes, we'll even try to do a song about something lyrically and we'll keep that in mind when we're doing the music. We'll keep the lyrics in mind, the ideas, and try to set some moods in there.

So do you go into practice with an idea or do you just let it evolve?

Chris: Everything. Every one of us will write stuff on guitar or sometimes one of us will just be standing there when we're taking a break and we'll be tooling around on our guitar and that'll be a song and sometimes at shows, we'll be messing around before the show and that'll become a song. It comes from everywhere. Sometimes it's planned and sometimes it just happens out of nowhere.

So does it ever work in reverse, starting off with lyrics and then going to music?

Chris: We've done that to a limited extent. There's definitely been a few times when we've been working on something and one of us would say, "I'm thinking about this," and then we'll work the music around that idea from the beginning, but you do have to have something to go off of, a first note. We try to make sure it's always different. We don't want to have a formula for writing songs. We just want to write songs, and really good songs. I want it to be different every time, all of us do. We're trying to write songs in as many different ways as we can and break that formula down and just throw it to the fucking ground, throw everything to the fucking ground - song structures, everything. Who cares? Who cares what you're supposed to do. Let's just do what we want to do. Let's do what sounds good to us, what means something to us.

What moves you.

Chris: Yeah. That's how we write songs. It seems like people are really getting into

"Nebraska" album (it's too dark, too grim, too unrepentant - too depressing) on the radio, but there have been times when I've been stunned to hear something beyond "Born in the U.S.A." (and other singles off the album of the same name), "Born To Run" and "Hungry Heart." And it always gets me when it happens.

Despite its sorry state these days - all programming consultants, one hit wonders being churned through the meat packaging plant of pop music, stultifying DJs who embody the twin spirits of dullness and stupidity, the incessant march toward homogenized popular musical styles and increasingly more segregated radio formatting - the medium still possesses the capacity to surprise, to astonish, to transcend the limitations imposed upon it. The medium has a mind of its own, and a willful spirit. I can almost believe that radio is sentient, an entity beyond tangibility but not beyond apprehension. I've heard too many Celine Dion CDs start to skip as I scanned the dial not to believe that radio can be as disgusted by insipid pop as the people who listen. I've heard too many good mornings when every song on every station screams for joy and liberation from the prison of the airwaves that confine it.

As I've grown older, I've discovered that many of the people who I consider my closest friends were also DJs, just as I was, many years ago. We all worked in different ways, but we all had the same goal - making radio worth listening to, even if it was only for a few hours. We're all retired now, save for sporadic incursions, border skirmishes that occur when we sneak in and commandeer the airwaves for the nefarious purpose of playing music that makes us feel alive again, music that we want and need to hear, and songs for people who call in and tell us that they need to hear it too. We all approached it like a ministry, like being a DJ had the same potential as being a priest. We all had a couple of broken down turntables, a few CD players and a microphone and for us, we might as well have been giving Mass in the Vatican. At least, that's how I always felt as I tore through 60 years of music, resequencing and recontextualizing it, making sense of it by throwing out all the programming rules and listening to things I had never heard before. And there it was, on the dial. In the middle of the night when everyone else was asleep, I was awake and spinning, practicing my mad scientist craft while the world around me slumbered. I didn't need sleep; I was living my dream.

Radio has always possessed the revolutionary potential to transcend the mundane and offer truly extraordinary sounds to listeners (which is to say something beyond the latest trend, be it a marginally modernized form of heavy metal tailored to appeal to teen angst, bastardized cross-over fusions that manage to bowdlerize musical styles that were insignificant and largely irrelevant to begin with, folk covers of rap songs, swing revivals, pop songs that pass under the guise of punk and rock stars who experience the churn rate of fans in the Internet era); it still does, as long as the mindless and unimaginative excuses for DJs and programmers who populate the airwaves like lemmings for fleeting musical trends stay out of it entirely. When that happens, magic is possible - anything is possible and the entity of radio can begin to exert its will and reveal its spirit to those who actively listen. Every once in a while, I hear it as I'm scanning the frequencies, and the sheer joy it inspires - the toe tapping, finger snapping, head bobbing, sing-along joy - reminds me why I keep my radio set to scan and why I listen as my coffee steams and stations fade in and out while the miles roll by.

"EQUALLY INSIDIOUS IS THE SMUG, EVEN CONTEMPTUOUS, DISMISSAL OF THE IDEA OF MUSIC - OR ANY ART - AS A DEEPER MEANS OF COMMUNICATION, AS A CONDUIT FOR PROFOUND PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION. TO HOLD ON TO THAT BELIEF, TO ACT ON IT, IS TO BE LABELED CLUELESS - OR CRAZY"

ERNEST HARDY

can hear a song in the middle of nowhere that rocks my world, pull over to the side of the road and wait to see if I can find out what it is and after 15 minutes, I still won't even know what radio station I'm listening to. I pull back onto the highway and start driving again with the knowledge that I might have hallucinated the song because I can't prove it ever existed and within 5 minutes, static fills the band where a song once played.

Maybe the song means more to me that way - I hear it once, knowing while I listen that I'll probably never hear it again and so I struggle to remember every note, every chord. Of course I can't - it's part of the game. I know as I listen that I'll try to remember and still forget the song in time, and that those notes and words will be lost to me. Perhaps their transience makes them more significant than they would be if I had that record on my shelf. Perhaps that fleeting contact makes them mean infinitely more to me than they would if I could reach over and turn on my stereo and hear it any time I wanted. Perhaps the combination of luck and unavailability, and the knowledge that it is distinctly temporal, make a simple pop song significant, if only for three minutes and change.

The point is that I just don't want to hear the latest MOR guitar pop one hit wonder. I really don't care about indistinguishable bands that sound the same, look the same and express the same vapid emotions in song and fail to reveal anything real. They're the emotional equivalent of processed food - it may temporarily address a hunger, but it isn't nutritious or filling. They don't move me.

These bands (there's really no point in naming them since they will most likely be forgotten and replaced by some other interchangeable manufactured pop star by the time you read this), treat each lyric as an epiphany, a profound emotional breakthrough which must be communicated to everyone within earshot, whether listeners want to hear it or not. You can put your heart in a blender and watch it spin around into a beautiful oblivion because s/he's so high above you and you can love them always forever, near and far, closer together and even though you don't want to miss a thing it *still* doesn't mean a fucking thing because it ain't got that *swing*. It's just another goddamn pop song which is, if anything, more embarrassing than any of the sparkling musical gems contained in Herman and the Hermits' catalog ("Mrs. Brown," indeed).

With that said, I have to confess that some pop gets me. Some of it always has and some of it always will. Luckily, most of it is musically respectable. I really don't mind stopping to listen to a Bruce Springsteen song because even his throwaway songs carry more emotional weight and substance than the most heartfelt efforts of more contemporary and currently popular musicians (witness "Dancing in the Dark," a song he wrote at Jon Landau's request to flesh out the "Born in the U.S.A." album. It's a three-minute castoff of a pop ditty that expresses more world-weariness and confusion than songs that set out to capture exactly those feelings, such as anything by Fastball or Matchbox 20/Twenty).

I don't mind stumbling across The Band, or some Dylan or Byrds songs. Van Morrison always receives a reprieve from the FM band scan. Dire Straits makes me cry, so I let the dial hold when I hear Mark Knopfler's characteristic chording. And every once in a while, I hear something truly astonishing that violates every written and unwritten rule of programming, like a DJ slapping on all 10 minutes of Bruce Springsteen's "Jungleland" at drive time or playing the live version of The Alarm's "Rescue Me" from the "Electric Folklore" EP or any version of "The Spirit of '76" ... at times like that, I just pull over and listen, stunned by the music I'm hearing and nearly equally stunned by the medium.

After all, it's not that unusual to hear the full version of Don McLean's "American Pie" - it actually happens fairly often, late at night because it's still a fairly popular song (and, in all fairness, a pretty damn good one). However, it's highly unusual for radio stations to throw on side-long tracks that aren't as popular, or by bands that aren't as well known. As an example, I can't imagine ever hearing Dire Straits' majestic, stately "Telegraph Road" on the radio, despite its shimmering late night alienation blues. On the other hand, I can't get away from "Money for Nothing." Therefore, it's always surprising to hear radio programming consultants, via their DJ proxies, digging deeper into bands and records. It is always rewarding to hear. I may not be able to imagine the unlikely event of hearing the title cut from Bruce Springsteen's

It.

Chris: Yeah, it's been great lately.

I know from my end of things, I felt kind of like I did when I first heard Hüsker Dü, not like I'm trying to compare the bands, but I got the same kind of feeling off the music.

Chris: That's cool, man. That's some serious shit. Hüsker Dü is some serious shit. **I know I keep bouncing around with these questions, but going back to the sense of community, from everything I've heard, it sounds like Gainesville is this really tight-knit community.**

Chris: It's a really small town. About a third of the total population there is students and it's a little teeny town and it's all really condensed. The outskirts might be the residents and families and stuff, but the core of the city is the students. We're all packed into a couple of miles. All these bands, all these artists, all of our friends, we're all packed into the same place. You live there for a year and you'll be able to walk a block and see 10 people you know. Everybody hangs out at the same places, everybody knows each other. It's like any small town, it's just that there's a shitload of fucking punk rockers there. It's a really small town and in any town that's that small, there's always going to be a huge sense of community because it is. It's your community. It's very urgent. It's a small town and everything that happens affects you directly. It's not a big city where shit is going on across town. It's in your front yard every day, so there's definitely a huge sense of community and it comes through in everybody's songs. All the bands and all the artists, everybody. You definitely know. You go into town and you know the scene. You can feel it, you can hear it when people talk. It's awesome. It's why we moved there. We're not from there, we moved there. None of us are even from Florida, but we met around Tampa. All of our families live around there, like south of Tampa. A half hour south of St. Pete is where we're all from. That's where we all met. I met those guys and then two or three months later after I met them, we were like, "Let's move to Gainesville." We had two different bands at that point and the scene was dead where we were. I had been going to Gainesville for a long time, I loved it, I knew the scene, I knew the community, I knew the vibe. We were all just like, "Yeah, let's go, let's try to do some music, let's really try it." So we moved to Gainesville and that's the reason.

Do you think Gainesville affects your music?

Chris: Totally. There's songs about what we were just talking about. There's songs about our community. There's a lot of songs about small town politics and the way it affects you. I'd rather not say which songs, I'd rather that just be evident, but it totally does. Any community affects what you're going to do. New York, crazy town and all the bands are really intense, really powerful and pounding the shit out of you. Out here, it's sunny and beautiful and there's a smooth thing going out here.

Either that or you get the cloth jacket emo boys.

Chris: Yeah. In general, there are always exceptions, but you can totally tell. **So the region helps determine the sound.** Chris: It's definitely a factor. It's not the only factor, but it's a factor, definitely. I mean, if you move to fucking Costa Rica for a year, you're going to make a pretty mellow album. It's just the way it happens. Your environment is a very big factor, definitely. **Going back to what you said when we were talking about "Our Own Way," it sounds like you want to let people get their own meaning.**

Chris: We leave it open. Exactly. That's the thing. I don't know if it's really on purpose, but most of our songs are not like, "Here's the problem and here's the solution." Most of the time, you don't even know what the hell we're talking about because we're not really talking about the problem, we're talking about how we're dealing with it and how we're thinking and what we're feeling at this moment, so yeah, they're always open to everything. There are very few songs of ours that you could tell me what it's about and be right. There's very few songs. You can have an idea, like the feeling that's going on, like this song is about heartbreak or anger or whatever. That's what I always like when I listen to bands. I like being able to relate to stuff. I like being able to put myself in the record so that probably has a lot to do with why we do that.

Yeah, and you also take on the big concepts like unity and solidarity.

Chris: Yeah. Sometimes I feel like unity, like that song "At the End of a Gun," the chorus of that song is "Unify, unify." I was sitting there, writing that, and I wrote it down on the paper but I didn't really plan on keeping it that way. I just wanted something that went with that idea and I wrote that down to keep it in my memory. I was just writing ideas

RADIO RAGGA

down, and the more I thought about it, it seemed kind of cheesy. I mean, how many people have fucking said that? Unless it's so drawn out. Well, that's what the fuck I wanted to say. That was a big thing for that album for me, like with the lyrics with "No Division." I didn't want any bullshit. Why overcomplicate something if you don't have to? If you want to, that's cool, but if you can say it in a word, and if you can say it in a note, let's do that. Let's make it clear this time. Let's just write, very clearly, what the fuck's going on.

That's one of the things I liked. You all seem like you're wearing your hearts on your sleeves.

Chris: Yeah. That's it. That's what I wanted to do. The thing for me was when I listened to the old albums we did, I hear parts of songs that just exploded in my face and I can't believe we did that and then we go into this breakdown that didn't need to be there at all or this thing that just doesn't do anything and it's just there to be like, "Oooh, check this out!" Whatever. I wanted to take all that out. I wanted it to be urgent and simple, so you know what the fuck we're talking about and there's no question. Just a simple album for us. Obviously, there's some crazy stuff for us, like especially for me, those are some of the most complicated guitar parts I've ever done. It isn't really that complicated, but for me it is. The song structures and the lyrical ideas and the way it got put together, I was definitely pushing for something a little more simple, a little more in your face. I'm still working on that. I'm still trying to get the album that we'll be remembered for and I don't know if we've done that yet and I'll never know until years down the road, but I'm still trying to do it. I'm still trying to make a really important album. I want it to have everything that I love about punk rock and rock and roll - just in your face, kicking ass. That's what I'm trying to do still. It's something that hopefully hasn't been done too much before and that sounds like

us. I still want to do an album that defines our band and I don't know if we've done it, but we were trying to do that with "No Division."

So what was working with Walter from Gorilla Biscuits and Quicksand like?

Chris: What do you think?

I'd guess it'd be pretty incredible, but I don't really know the guy.

Chris: Yeah, he's a cool motherfucker. He's a funny guy. He produced the album but he didn't really do it in the traditional sense of how the big business guys talk about it. Producing, you think he came to practice every day and helped write the songs. He showed up at the studio and he had heard demos of some of the songs and he helped us. He didn't try to change anything about it or tell us what wasn't working or anything like that. He was there to make sure we did it as good as we could and that's what he helped us out with. He kept our spirits up and made us do the vocals over and over until it was as fucking good as we could do it and that's what was so awesome about him. He's got a very good outlook on life. He's one of those dudes that when he's around you, you know it. He just has this persona. He's a very positive guy. He'll keep you from arguing, he'll keep you focused, keep you working on what you need to be working on. That was incredible. I would love to do it again with him because he was just such a good person to have in that kind of situation.

Like I said, the *BYO Leatherface* split was my introduction to you guys. How did that happen?

Chris: I don't know how I worked it out, but we did a cover of a Leatherface song, "Springtime," and they were broken up so we didn't really think too much about it. We recorded it for a benefit comp that we weren't going to make any money off of, but I heard they got back together. So I was like, "I really don't want to piss these guys off." I mean, we did the song because we like these guys, I don't want them to be fucking pissed. I had Var from No Idea track down Frankie's phone number and I called him up like a million times and finally got ahold of him, and I was like, "Listen, we covered one of your songs, we're not going to make any money off of it, it's a benefit, the only thing I can do is send you some copies. I can't give you any money because we're not going to make any money." He was like, "Oh cool, what song?" I said it was "Springtime" and he said, "Oh, that's fucking brilliant! You totally have my blessing." He had never

Every so often, I tackle a piece of music criticism that's really too weighty for anyone but Paul Williams and a select handful of writers who also experience music as religion more than employment. I suspect it's why I write less about the music and more about the effect it has on me: it is a terribly narcissistic way to approach it, but this is a fanzine and I am a fan, and it may be the case that in my struggle to understand why I respond as I do to music that you may recognize something you have also felt.

Usually when I'm driving to work, I listen to tapes I've made, or old cassettes that I never got rid of after I finished high school. The other day, I was listening to "New Day Rising" on the way to work. Driving up the 15, window down, needle around 80 or so, coffee in my hand and Grant Hart thudding alone in lightspeed 4/4 hardcore time - that fucking tremendous intro pounding in my ears and the anticipation of that slight feedback before all hell breaks loose. Those beats seem like a goddamn eternity, and then Bob Mould's Flying V comes blasting in like a fucking Apache gunship on a strafing run, low and fast, spraying distorted shrapnel everywhere.

But sometimes I don't want to listen to a tape. Sometimes I don't want to hear the same thing I heard yesterday. Most of the time, I lock the dial on the local bebop jazz station until the reception fades out. After that, I'm about the worst when it comes to changing stations. I scan through the stations from home to work and back again. It's a distance of about 20 miles, and unless I hear something - anything - that grabs my ear, I keep moving. The road rushes under my wheels, the coffee steams in the cup holder, my finger pushes buttons, my eyes watch the road. Everything has an assigned function - wheels, hands, coffee, eyes - and it all works properly until my finger pushes a button and my ears perk up.

It can be anything, really. Like most people, what I want to hear depends on my mood, and typically it isn't what's on the radio. As an example, an old pop/soul band called Chairman of the Board did a great song - I think it's called "Give Me Just A Little More Time" - that a radio programmer sees fit to throw into the rotation about every six months. When I stumble across it, I'm still in awe. The band, as far as I know, had one hit, but what a hit! Plaintive, pleading vocals, every last word imbued with regret, sorrow and the desire to make things work out. The bass is a rumbling foundation, and a rocky one - it's clear from the musical underpinnings that the way back is not easy. Yet every time I hear this song, my hand, as if it had a mind of its own, turns the volume knob all the way to the right and keeps spinning it, trying to increase the volume more. My hands and feet start tapping and I try to sing along with the words I know, even though the song is entirely out of my vocal range and I usually wind up engaged in something much closer to yelping. Luckily for my friends, I usually only do this when alone.

Far more frequently, I'll be listening to a radio station as I'm on the road and hear a song that grabs me. It could be new, it could be old - it just makes me dance in my seat and try to figure out the chorus so I can start yelling along. Then the radio station fades out or the DJ never says what song it is. In fact, for years I didn't know who did the aforementioned song: it was only this year that a DJ finally mentioned Chairman of the Board (side note to all DJs: tell people what you fucking play!!!). It's the nature of radio, I guess. I



Shakespeare wasn't this melodramatic. Grand, emotional ballads and soaring guitar riffs - the duo of Brett Anderson and Bernard Butler was a partnership to behold. Take the brooding shadow of Morrissey, throw in the Top 40 hooks of the Cure, add the grandeur of Pink Floyd and turn the guitar amp up 'til the riffs get loud and fuzzy - and you've got "Dog Man Star." "New Generation" might just also be one of the great singles of the decade. As said in the year-end issue of Q, "Dog Man Star" deserves a place in any serious record collection. Without question.

Manic Street Preachers: "Everything Must Go" & "This Is My Truth Tell Me Yours" - Okay, the purists love the old shit (what else is new?). They love the old Guns N' Roses metal shit and they love the old "Holy Bible" era shit. Me? I love their latest shit. The Manics, like old TSOL, have managed to reinvent themselves on an almost yearly basis. But losing guitarist and founding member Richey James to suicide (they think - he's still classified as missing) in early '95 was a change they probably weren't anticipating. Still, the remaining boys regrouped and promptly put out one of the best singles ever - "Design for Life" - followed by an equally great album, 1998's "Everything Must Go." Big sound; big hooks; big, soaring vocals - the band that was slated for the archives started anew and blew everyone away. "This is My Truth Tell Me Yours" is more of the same and don't let Puckett tell you differently. [Puckett: No dissent on "EMG" - great fucking album - (and a substantial amount of dissent on the merits of "TIMTMY" which I still think is unadulterated shit) but listen to "Last Exit on Yesterday" or "Moton Junk" - two of the greatest RNR songs ever - so you can understand what a proper Manics song sounds like.]

As for the rest of my list, it's far too long to go into any more detail.

Here's the short and clever rest of the story ...

Pulp: "Different Class" - Fronted by the man who lampooned Wacko Jacko in front of the alleged king of pop himself, as well as the entire English recording industry, Pulp is like Blur but sometimes even better. Clever songwriting, incredible variety, memorable hooks - "Different Class" is a keeper.

Supergrass: "1 Should Coco" & "Supergrass" - More fun than a barrel of skanking monkeys on ecstasy. "1 Should Coco" was my best album of '95 and I still hold that opinion. Their self-titled latest record is more mature as they say, but still has all the great riffs and sing-along choruses we've come to expect from the lads from Oxford.

Elastica: "Elastica" - What can I say? Wire meets the Donnas. Fast, snotty, catchy and really fucking cool. Another best of '95. Keep your eyes out for their follow-up. That's right, 5 years later. The No Doubt of the UK in proliferation.

Boo Radleys: "Make Up Boo!" - What an arse I am. You can't even buy this 'cause it's fuckin' deleted. Bastards. Scour your local used record store. The title track is the infectious tune of the century. I dare you not to sing along.

Travis: "Good Feeling" & "The Man Who" - Okay, now we're getting up to speed. Scottish darlings who are currently making a dent in the US market with the melancholy "Why Does it Always Rain on Me?" Sweet, earnest ballads with the occasional rocker. "Turn" from "The Man Who" might have the anthemic chorus of the year.

Stereophonics: "Performance" & "Cocktails" - Not the most original lads, but see them live and they'll restore your belief in straight-ahead, pour-me-a-pint pub rock. Singer sounds like Rod Stewart but looks like Jeff Mallet. Might also have the greatest drummer since Keith Moon - keep fingers away from this guy's mouth.

Jarvis: "Millionaires" - Like "Laid" but better. Britpop at its finest. Hugely catchy songs with hooks you can chew and choruses you can hang your hat on. Bit of the Eurotrash beat thrown in for occasional spice.

Ocean Colour Scene: "One From the Modern" - So these guys never left the 60's. So what? The world can never have too many Beatlesque melodies. Dig it, man.

Cast: "Beat Mama" - Bass player for the La's went on to form his own group when the aforementioned band imploded after one record. Catchy, poppy, beat-infested guitar masterpiece. Perfectly crafted pop. Can't get it here, but it's worth the \$26 from Amazon.com.

heard of us or anything. I was like, "I heard you guys were back together; are you going to come to America?" He said no, and I was like, "We do all right in America, why don't you guys come over and tour with us? We'll make sure that everything goes really well." I had also heard they were on BYO, so I was like, "You've got to come to America if you're going to be on BYO, you have to support the record." He was like, "We'll call BYO and if they know you guys and think it's a good idea, then Leatherface is going to do it."

There was the tour, right there. I called BYO and they thought it was a good idea and I asked them about doing a split to help the tour out. I was talking about a 7" and then they were like, "We're thinking about doing this series of 12" splits." I was like, "We're working on an album right now, we really don't have enough songs," and they told us if we could write enough then they'd do that. I really thought it was a good idea. I always think it's a good idea to do a split for the tour. It's something you can remember. You've got a piece of wax there.

Plus, you've got something for the merch table to help pay for gas and food and stuff.

Chris: Yeah, and it's always helpful in that regard, but more, it's a slab of wax that commemorates that tour. It's solid. It'll always be there. So I was like, "Let's fucking do this." How many chances do you get to do a split with Leatherface? How awesome is that? It just happened. We did the split, we did the tour. Next month, we're going to be in Europe and do a couple of shows with them. They're just fucking awesome guys. They're just so cool. We're talking about doing another split. They're just so great. And that's how it happened. It made sense so it happened. They needed to come over here, we wanted them to come over and we wanted to do it with them, we wanted to do a split and if we can do it right now, then let's do it. It happened so quick, and that's my favorite record that I've ever been on. I get to look at it, and I'm like "Leatherface and Hot Water Music, holy shit." That's cool as fuck. It always seems like the stuff that means the most comes together fast.

Chris: Yeah, that's the thing. It makes fucking sense. It fits in, totally.

So do you see any similarities between HWM and Leatherface?

Chris: I see tons. The reason we get along is because we're very similar people. We're very serious about what we do. This is our life. We've dedicated everything to this. This

is true for most punk bands, definitely. It's no joke. I mean, for the first few years, you're out there busting your fucking ass, starving and losing jobs and losing girlfriends and losing your house. You have to be serious if you're going to keep doing it. Most of the bands that keep really true to why they started, that's always a factor of why they break up. Panthro U.K. United 13, a great band from Gainesville, they just broke up for not too different reasons. That tears up a lot of bands. You have to have solidarity. In order to sacrifice what you have to sacrifice, you have to have some kind of solidarity in your band or else you're not going to be able to do it because you're going to go fucking crazy. Why am I doing this? Why am I putting myself through this if we're not all together?

I know where you're coming from. I got out of punk in the mid '90s because it all seemed boring - just Epitaph chain wallet bands playing the forbidden beat. It was bands like you and Lifetime and Cap'n Jazz that got me back into it. It seemed like that guys really meant it, like the spirit that I loved was still there.

Chris: That whole time, I wasn't really in the same place you were. There have always been bands that kept me into it and they don't always get looked at because people don't want to hear something new. People want to hear something they're comfortable with, something they already know how to dance to. They don't want to figure out anything new. Now there's a lot of bands and there's a lot of weird shit going on right now. A lot of better bands in punk rock are doing really fucking crazy shit, like Braid. They did so much bizarre stuff, and Elliott, when Elliott plays, you just kind of drop your jaw, like "What in the hell?" Yeah, I've got "U.S. Songs" in my bag right now.

Chris: Wait until you hear their new album. It's absolutely ridiculous. Wait until you hear the new Leatherface album. These are the bands that you watch live and you're just like, "That is a band. That is the epitome of what that means." These bands are bands. They're not a punk band, they're just exactly what a band is supposed to be, whatever that means and it's different all the time, but they are it. This is a band and this is their music. That's it. I want to have my ass kicked all over the place when I listen to a record. I want to be like, "What the fuck?" So it sounds like you like records that are so good that they make you wonder why

you play music.

Chris: Yeah, totally. That's why we're all listening to it. We want to hear something amazing. That's why we both like punk rock because even if the music or the lyrics aren't amazing, there's an energy and vibe there that you just can't fucking deny, when it's done right, when the people are really doing it.

And their hearts are in it. I read an essay a few years back written by a girl in high school who described ripping through books, magazines, records, looking for anything that might make her feel like her life wasn't meaningless and like she wasn't dying every day. I know that's why I got into punk, but why did you get into it?

Chris: I don't know. It's probably that adolescent horror. Who am I? Why am I so angry about everything? Why does nothing make sense? Why is it all terrible? I was looking for answers. I don't know if I found any answers in punk rock necessarily by listening to it, but the music led me to a lifestyle and the lifestyle has given me tons of answers. I'm definitely not a Christian, I'm not really religious in any way that you would think, but I'm on a spiritual journey. I'm always trying to find myself and always looking for my answers, always trying to better myself, and this has always been the path. There's always been the most down to earth people, the people who are most like me who are also on this journey and trying to make everything better. That's why I got into it. There are people willing to fight.

People willing to fight for the same reasons and goals.

Chris: Yeah. It's very accepting. It's a very accepting lifestyle for everything different. It's not a fucking slogan. It's not "Celebrate diversity!" It's not a fucking slogan. It is celebrating diversity, it is the fucking mutts of society. There's the fucking dogs and the assholes and the jerks that got picked on. That's what it is. It is diversity and that's fucking amazing to me.

Yeah, it's not the kind of backpack you wear.

Chris: Yeah, and it's not a fucking slogan. God knows people made it into quite a few bumper stickers, but that's not what it is. That's why I got into punk rock. That's why I fucking love it. It had answers in the lifestyle to calm down what is hurting me.

I know what you mean. I got my answers from Bob Mould's Flying V.

Chris: Right. Totally.

What would you be doing if you weren't in punk rock?

Chris: If I hadn't found punk rock - I don't know. Obviously, if I hadn't found punk rock, I wouldn't be in this band. I've always wanted to teach. I want to be a teacher. I quit school. I'm done with it until this band is over. I don't have time, but I love kids. I have a 4-year-old kid, and I love that experience. There's a lot of that in punk rock.

Everybody's teaching everybody something, maybe not even by words, but everybody's learning something.

How does being a parent affect your music?

Chris: It definitely affects it. It affects everything. I take everything a lot more seriously. Everything you do, you have to kind of step out and ask if you should be doing this, you know, like you have a kid looking at you and I've got to make sure he's not mindfucked by the time he's 10 years old, angry youth, hating his parents, confused about what's right and wrong. It's a big obligation so it affects everything. I mean, I have to be there for him and I love that kid. I've got to be there for him and I've got to show him what I know. It affects everything. It affects everything about the band, my lyrics, my lifestyle, everything that I do, the way I live, everything. It's an amazing thing.

I've interviewed a lot of people over the years, and out of everyone I've talked to, you are one of the most committed - to your band, to your music, everything - people that I've ever talked to.

Chris: I believe in what I do. I don't believe I'm the greatest guy or anything, but I believe in what I do, in what I say and fight for. I believe in my friends and I believe in what they say and fight for. I'm scared. I'm very scared of a life with no passion. I'm terrified of that. It just fucking terrifies me and it's always terrified me. The big city is gray - gray sidewalk, gray street, gray buildings, gray suits, no fucking color in the people's skin, black hair - no color, no life, no passion, just the fucking grind and that fucking terrifies me. I can't even think of that. It's just terrible to me, so I believe in what I'm doing. I believe in finding the passion and keeping it going and keeping the fire burning in every way. If you let it die somewhere, it's just going to die everywhere.

It doesn't sound like you have any choice to do anything besides what you're doing.

Chris: Yeah, it fucking scares the shit out of

(yes, I know Bush are Brits - but the Brits don't).

To give you some background, I was lucky enough to spend a semester at the University of London during the heyday of British pop - early 1995. "Britpop" they called it and god DAMN if it didn't rock my world - guitars and hooks, sweet melancholy vocals, strange horns and synthesizers (hadn't heard one of those in years!), all drenched in poppy Englishness. Fantastic albums, one after the other, crammed the UK charts like a fish-locked boat for the entire duration of my stay (and then long after). Blur, Oasis, Suede, Gene, Supergrass - these were the names that plastered the fronts of NME, Melody Maker, Q and all the rest of the UK rags.

"Supersonic" blasted from BBC Radio One AND Two. "Parklife" and "New Generation" videos blared from the TV. "Caught by the Fuzz" and "Wake Up Boo" fueled my logs through Hyde and Kensington parks. "Boys & Girls" had me shaking my hips for the first time since Junior high dances. The English pop landscape was abuzz and full of energy. Everyone knew something exciting was going on. Finally, there was a soundtrack for the 90's and it was called Britpop.

So, with all this great music, why are UK artists still so fucking uncool in America?

Well, it's a combination of factors.

Part of it is a backlash not unlike the anti-disco 80's (forget all those 70's parties you went to in the 90's - remember just how fucking uncool anything from the 70's was back in the Reagan days?). This time the backlash is against pale, brooding, masochist wearing, effeminate Limeys synonymous with Brit bands from the 80's. "That Depeche Mode sound is out." "That Cure look is out." Therefore the English are out.

It's also our rejuvenated love for big guitars, throaty vocals and the American Sound (although in reality that American Sound is about as American as Led Zeppelin or Cream - which is another story altogether). We rediscovered our love for tough guy, Bud-drinking, testosterone-fueled rawk. And while thankfully the macho jerk-off guitar solos of the 70's and 80's never really came back, the essence of the whole genre was, and still is, back in black (if you think there's really much difference between Grand Funk Railroad, Soundgarden and Kid Rock, think again).

Toss in a bit of jingoistic flag waving from a nation that's currently enjoying one of the most prosperous periods in its history, and you've got a recipe for eyes and ears turning inward - "We like our country. We like our music. We're sick of depressing, cheesy English shit. We want to party. We want to kick ass. We want to turn up the amps to eleven and we want to fuckin' RAWK!"

Rah rah, fucking rah.

Do yourself a favor. If you like melody, if you like great hooks, if you like songs that bend and curve and sometimes have funny instruments in them, if you like the Beatles, if you like great voices and are totally sick of metal rap - check out some of these records. They're wonderful, every one of them. Promise.

Blur, "Parklife" & "The Great Escape" - Two concept albums spanning two years. The pinnacle of Blur's greatness. One explores the underbelly of British working class life ("Parklife") and boasts a delightful cast of colorful characters. The other views the English landscape from the top, introducing the listener to a host of offbeat upper class twits and their absurd lives. The music bounces from fast, punky rave-ups to dramatic, sweeping ballads and hits everything in between - not to mention more instruments than Fat Albert's junkyard band. As Peter Buck would say, a must (and if you must pick just one, go with "Parklife").

(The London) Suede, "Dog Man Star" - Another masterpiece from the class of '94. Heads up the list along with "Parklife" and Oasis. "Definitely Maybe." Talk about drama - fuck,

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

BY TOM PARKER

As the 80's gave way to the 90's, millions of hair-sprayed American youth crowded the eastern shore of Great Britain, rinsed their eyeliner in the surf and looked West for a way home.

New wave was long dead. The Clash was long gone. New Romanticism wasn't new anymore (again) and Goth was slithering back into its coffin. Even the new wave of British heavy metal had run its course.

Attitude, raves and Hawaiian shirts? Fuck it all. Get us off this fucking rock.

And soon the rescue began. By way of rap, punk, grunge - whatever could float for fuck's sake - the Americans fled the tiny but mighty musical empire even as the Madchester generals turned their shoe-gazing guns on the deserting beachhead.

Before you could say Charlatans UK, the Americans had slipped through their fingers and were gone.

Escaped.

Back across the pond to the land where a new day was rising. Where girls bumped to the sound of sampled rap beats and boys slammed to the revamped sounds of punk and hard rock, stripped down and born anew.

"Hai" the editors at NME laughed. "They'll be back. Wait 'til they hear Suede." And they waited.

"It's all shite," Melody Maker proclaimed. "Except for Nirvana ... of course. And Beck." And they waited some more.

"Still on vacation with grunge," they persisted mid-decade. "The Americans will soon come 'round." And they kept on waiting.

But guess what?

They didn't come back. The American contingent had moved the fuck out.

Oh sure, maybe a few visits here and there - a quick holiday for a bit of Oasis ... maybe a dash of Radiohead. A conjugal visit or two for a quick quaff of Scary Spice's Union Jack knickers. But that's about it.

For 10 years British pop music has continued to rank in America as only slightly more popular than Hawaiian folk music and just a hair less cool than Foghat cover bands.

It's all too bad. Because for the last 10 years the Pearl Jam, Bush, Limp Bizkit loving Yanks have been missing out on some fantastic music

me. People working and working to fucking make money and make money all the time so that someday when they're 65 years old, they can have some fun and I don't believe in that. I don't believe in that work ethic, I don't fucking believe in that lifestyle and I never have. It just never made any sense to me. Why am I not living right now? I'm going to fucking live and that's it and that's I want to do. I want to live to live.

"Don't want to live my life for when I'm 65."

Chris: Right.

Is there anything more that you wish you were doing with the band?

Chris: We never had a plan. We never had a goal. Of course there's short-term goals.

When we first started and we were in Gainesville, we were like, "Man, it would be cool if we could someday do a record on No Idea." There's always those. That's the thing. If you set a road ahead of yourself that has no detours, then you're not really living.

You're not leaving yourself any room to go where you feel like you should be going. It's the same thing in writing songs. If you have a structure that you're doing, well then you're not really letting yourself write songs. Just let it be what it is. Let's go and do this band and every day we'll make a new decision. Every day my life will change and every day our band will change and every day we'll get closer to something else. Whatever that is. Let's just let that be what it is. Let's let this band be what it is, let's let the songs be what they are and let's let us be what we are. It sounds like the music you listened to really influenced you personally.

Chris: 7 Seconds rocked me out of my mind.

"Walk Together, Rock Together"?

Chris: Yeah, and "The Crew." Oh man. It's such simple songs, the same beat for every song. The Forbidden Beat, as you say. It's actually an old Bad Religion song title.

Chris: Really?

Yeah, I think it's off "Suffer." It just describes what most So Cal punk bands are trying to do. If it wasn't for tltWhel, there wouldn't be much to do here.

Chris: Yeah, totally.

Yeah, I'm actually heading to Japan with them.

Chris: There's such great people over there. It's crazy over there. The shows are really small but you don't mind. It's the same thing as here. It's a selective group. Our first tour in Japan was like our first tour here. We had a couple of shows where there was definitely

a big crowd of people and some shows where you play to like 35 people, like a house show and then a club show. It's awesome because the people at those shows want to be there. They're there not because their friends are going - nobody's friends are there, there's only 35 people there. They're there because they want to fucking be there. It's not the place to be. If there's 35 people from a whole city at your show, it's definitely not the place to be. Even in Tokyo, that was our biggest show and we had 200 people there both nights, but when you think about how big that city is, give me a fucking break, but that's not why you're doing it. You're there to play to those people, the people who say, "I want to be here and I want to see this. I love this." There was a kid in Tokyo, the second show, right against the stage in a wheelchair. He was right up in the front, people smashing him to bits and he's in a wheelchair. The whole time, he had his fist in the air, just screaming and yelling, just loving it. That's passion. That's why we're all doing this. This is the stuff that keeps you going whether you're in a band or not. That's the kind of energy, that's the spark, that's what it's all about. It was amazing. It's like that in Europe too. It's like when you first got into punk rock. You had this kind of idealism, like this is so big and so amazing. At that time, it was pretty big and amazing, but it wasn't everything that you thought it was. It's kind of grown into that because it really is a spectacular thing. You've got people dropping out of the scene left and right but you've got tons more coming in all the time. You can go pretty much anywhere in the world right now and people are pretty much going to know what you're talking about, whether they even understand your language. It's so amazing to be able to see that because 15 years ago because when you had this idealism and people are like, "Fuck whatever," and your parents are like, "Fuck you and your hair color, turn down your record player," and you're like, "You don't understand, this is so amazing!" And it is. Now, you get to see that. You go across the world and a 12-year-old kid in Japan comes to your show or a 40-year-old guy in Germany. I don't think it's turned into anything we thought it could be, yet, but it's reaffirming. I'm not saying we've turned it into anything because I don't think we have, but it keeps the fire burning to go around the world and see different people who you never would have any contact with if it wasn't for punk rock or this music or feeling.

It's totally reaffirming to be able to do that. I don't think it's turned into anything. I don't think we've gotten that much accomplished. Yet.

It's just a common language.

Chris: Yeah. You finally get to see that there really are people everywhere feeling like you felt when you were a kid, like totally lost and not understanding the ways of the modern world, like go, go, work, work, work, money, money, money. That despair you feel when you're like, "I don't want to go to college if it means I'm going to be wearing a suit the rest of my life." There's people everywhere that feel that and you're not the outsider that you thought you were. That's what I'm talking about.

It's a place where everybody belongs.

Chris: It's a place that we get to live. That's awesome. That's amazing shit.

Yeah, because I don't know about you, but when I was in high school, I was an outcast. I read books at lunch.

Chris: Yeah, everybody was.

Yeah, I had like one friend at first and he turned me on to Black Flag and the Dead Kennedys and we went to go skate and we were our only friends. We listened to records and that's all there was. I think every punk has some story like that.

Chris: It's great man. I just love it.

What's the best thing for you about being in Hot Water Music?

Chris: Lately, like the last year, we've been touring a lot. We're always gone. Because of that, we've been making enough money that when I go home, I don't have to work for money. That could be taken in the way that we're making money and that's the best thing it's done for me, but that's not what I'm talking about and I don't think it's the best thing and I don't think there's any best thing, but it is awesome. I've been playing guitar since I was 8. I'm 24 now, and it's totally

awesome that I found that, that I was given that gift by my family, they got me a guitar. That love and what I've found in punk rock that has kept me doing this, and in music in general, it's now supporting me. I don't think that's the most amazing thing, but it's so cool. The whole time you're growing up, you're like "I don't believe in this society. I don't believe in this way of life. I don't want to be a suit, I don't want to be a number. I don't want to be stereotyped. I don't want to be classified." It's been said so many times. Lately, I'm not. I don't work for anybody. I'm not in the system. I'm in a band and that's my life and all my friends are in this with me.

They're all in it with me. My family is in it with me. We're all supporting each other. I think that's just fucking great, to be able to dive into this lifestyle where everybody's like, "Someday, you're going to have to get a job. Someday, you're going to have to shed this problem with authority and whatever the hell is wrong with you. You're going to have to shape up or ship out." No, I don't have to. Fuck off. It's taken me a long fucking time, but I don't have to. I don't have to be back in the kitchen right now and I probably will be back in a kitchen by the time this band is done. I'm going to have to get a job somewhere, but for now, fuck off. I am right. This can be done. I'm proving that right now and I get to show this to my kid. My kid's looking at me not like, "Oh, my dad broke his back in a factory." I'm from Flint, Michigan. General Motors town.

Chris: Yeah. Both my grandparents worked at Buick their whole lives. That's not the example I'm setting for my kid. I'm setting the example of you do whatever the fuck you want and if you really do it right and you really believe in it and you give it all you've got, it could work out. Be whatever the fuck you want to be. And that's awesome. It's about the best thing you could give a kid.

Chris: That's why I'm saying that I don't know if there is any great thing that punk rock gave me or that I gave to punk rock or whatever, but that's an amazing gift that I get to give to my kid and live. I just get to do what I fucking want to do and that's awesome.

That's a beautiful fucking thing.

Chris: It is a beautiful fucking thing, it totally is.



they'll be bored. I'll never forget one night when we played in Minneapolis and the show was just packed. There were about 900 people there and it was the worst show we ever had and that was a big room. We were at First Avenue, whereas we played several times at the Seventh Street Entry which is the small room right next door to it and still part of the same complex and those were always great shows. Again, that "No Equalizer" theory is good because you can't appreciate the great times if you only have great times. Of course, I'd love to have more great times than bad times, that's something to strive for, but as far as music and performances and creativity go, you have to try and beat what you're doing. You can't be content with the status quo, or at least I can't.

Well, you know what really made this album for me? Keith Richards' tasty slide.

Dave: Well, that wasn't on this one. I just had to throw it in.

Dave: Oh, okay. Well, there's really a Keith Richards' tasty slide on every song that we've ever done. It's just mixed really low. It's subtle. It's backwards. It's a backwards slide. It says, "Go out and overthrow society and start your own government."

I can't think of a better way to end this interview than that.

Dave: Actually, I'll give you another Jefferson quote to end the interview.

That's better.

Dave: He said, "I hold that a little rebellion now and again is a good thing. The tree of liberty must be watered from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure."

Now that's rock and roll if I ever heard it.

Dave: Yeah. That's rock and roll if it was a head or a heart. I don't think I have any head left after this in-depth conversation. I'm just going to have to go out and just go speeding up and down the boulevard. I would love to see you sometime soon and as usual, excellent questions. I really appreciate the love you have for the songs because that really means a lot to me.

Like I told you earlier, I only interviewed most bands once. I've interviewed you for Down By Law 3 times, and once about punk. It's almost a Down By Law fanzine.

Dave: Well, you know, I'm going to be writing. I don't want to call it an autobiography because that implies, sometimes, that you've done everything, but I'll be writing a life story up until now that will probably be centered mostly on music

because I don't think people care - well, some people do, but most people don't care about the other side of my life. Everybody's always asking me about ALL and DYS and Dag Nasty and the early part of Down By Law, and so I'm going to write that at some point. When I do, I'm going to include snippets from interviews and things like that throughout. It'll be like a story, but with lyrics thrown in that are relevant to what I'm talking about or whatever, and certainly interviews we've done. I'll be contacting you at that point to reread these and see what the best parts are because some of the ones we've done have been some of the best Down By Law interviews.

I know I still have the tapes and the zines. I may not have the files though.

Dave: It would be better if you have the issues because that would be cooler to have it printed as exactly as it appears. That's kind of my image. There would be a lot of diverse fonts and formats of things in the book because it would be stuff like that, like if somebody sent in a snapshot, you put it in there exactly the same size as what it came in and things like that. A fanzine interview would be reprinted in the same font and type size that it was in. It would be more accurately reflective of the time and of the printer and publisher of the fanzine.

Do you have a Web page up yet?

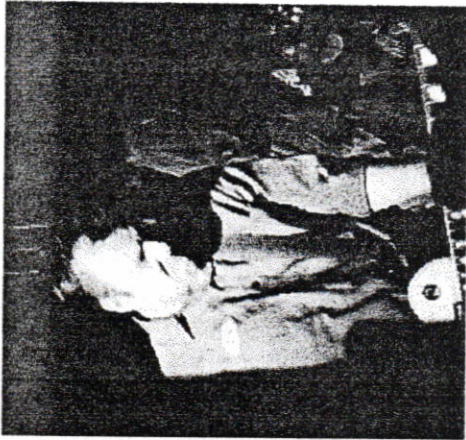
Dave: There's an unofficial Web page. You could probably contribute a lot to it. Sam knows the guy who does it. He's very knowledgeable and stuff.

I have no problems with giving people stuff as long as they don't turn around and charge for it.

Dave: Oh no, he's not like that. He's a good guy.

Yeah. I figure any Down By Law fan can't be bad.

Dave: You know, it sounds cliché, but we really do have the best ones. I swear to God. I see bands, and I'm on the Warped tour and I see our fans, and we have the same fans as a lot of other bands as well. Last time, we were on the Warped Tour in America all up and down the East Coast from Canada into Florida, but the degree of participation is just so much more personal and special that it's really nice.



consequence of that, with the new songs that we do, kids have come up to us and said, "That song really sums up how I feel about this." It's really their song then. The reason I'm going off on this digression is because that line is not what I thought of when I wrote it, but if that's what you think it is then that's what it is. It's no better or worse an interpretation. I actually read a long time ago, Kurt Cobain had said something similar to that. Whatever you think it is, it is because what I thought is one version. God knows, Nirvana lyrics are so opaque that you can really put your spin on it. It sounds like reader response criticism, which dictates that a work's meaning is whatever the reader derives, regardless of the author's intent.

Dave: I agree with that. Some people read The Bible and are only concerned with the Old Testament. It doesn't mean that they're right to leave out the New Testament, but for some people, that is their Bible and their way. I agree with that, in general. As long as you aren't completely misinterpreting and as long as you don't take a song like "Self-Destruction" and say, "Oh yeah, that's a pro-Nazi song," or something completely off the wall that has nothing to do with the song, which is completely ludicrous, a meaning that's reasonable and makes sense from the words, I would think that's a fair interpretation.

Overall, what's your sense of this album?

Dave: I think it's hands down, my favorite Down By Law record. It's definitely my favorite songs that I've written. That doesn't mean that I don't love all of our songs that we've had over the years, but to me, this is some of my favorite work that I personally

have done. Sam wrote the music for "Burning Heart" and a few others."

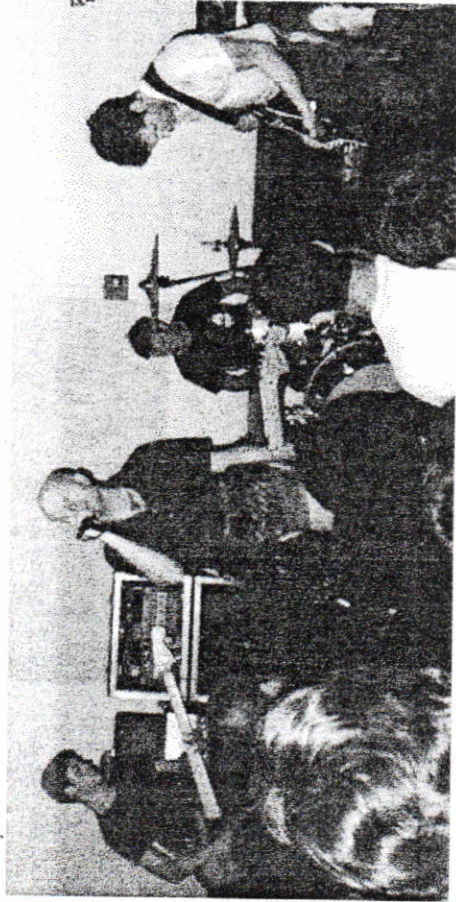
And "D.J.G.," one of my favorites.

Dave: Oh cool, I'll tell him that. And "Factory Day." He wrote the music for that and those two songs are some of his best songs, I think, that he's ever done. I just think that everybody kicked ass. It was all because I co-produced the album [laughs]. I'm just kidding. For some reason, things worked really well on this record and all cylinders were go, and as far as the overall mood of the album, it's a bit reflective. It's a bit political and it's definitely not a good time record. I wouldn't put it on at a frat party, but for the true music lover, a true person who really loves to get something more personal out of their music, I think it would be hard to top this record, at least with recent releases.

One of the things that I love about talking with you is that every new album is your favorite, and each time, you're talking about how the band has gotten better.

Dave: It's funny because the first two records were such a different time. It was a whole different lineup from me, Sam and John. I always call this Down By Law 2. You know how there's Big Audio Dynamite and Big Audio Dynamite II. Big Audio Dynamite II is, to me, the one that really writes great songs. They had "The Globe," and things like that. To me, that's when Down By Law had a new life of its own, when Sam and John and me banded together. That was really a new thing. I almost see the band in some ways as starting over again. To me, each time has gotten better. In hindsight,

"Punkrockacademy" is such a strong record. In hindsight, I would probably say that I like "Punkrockacademy" now better than "All Scratched Up," but I still love "All Scratched Up." I try to always think that way, or at least I always try to challenge myself as a songwriter and as a lyricist to meet or beat what I did before because it's kind of like "No Equalizer." That's one of those things I always really loved about The Who, or the Clash or the Jam or Queen, who Sam's really into. There are a lot of bands that we all like and one of the things that's common to them is that they tried a lot of different things and had a lot of different evolutions and periods. They did have ups and downs and certainly Down By Law has ups and downs in its creativity and also its stage shows. The joke is that we're either kings or downs. One night we'll be playing and there will be 1,000 people and they're going crazy and the next night there will be 300 and



It's hard to find bands that treat guitar-driven rock like art, yet there are a few that create music that is positively transcendent. The melodic rise and fall is like watching a perfect swan dive off a 10-meter platform - it starts slow and then builds in intensity until it breaks the surface of the water, leaving ripples spreading across the pool for hours. And this is what Elliott's music is like. It ranges from ethereal, stately pop to walls of guitar noise that crash down like a 20-foot wave breaking as it nears the shore. I talked to singer/guitarist Chris Higdon for about an hour on a Saturday morning.

For the record - is it one T or two Ts?

Chris: Two Ts. Two Ls and two Ts. Okay. I had just seen it a lot of different ways.

Chris: We were joking that the second album was going to be called "Two Ls, Two Ts." No one seems to be able to get it right, not even our label, sometimes.

The new album title actually has something to do with cathedrals, right?

Chris: "False Cathedrals."

Does it build on what you were doing on "If They Do" and the "In Transit" 7"? Those songs sound a little different than the first full-length.

Chris: Yeah. That was stuff we put out because "U.S. Songs" took so long to come out, as this one is too. "U.S. Songs" took so long that we had a lot of time working on things before we really sat down and started working on a new album, so all the stuff that we released kind of bridges the gap. So we put that out and showed the process because there's definitely a progression between "U.S. Songs" and "False

Cathedrals," but I think it's fairly natural if you were around with the band from the live shows to the time in between, but yeah, it's definitely a different album than "U.S. Songs" and a different perspective, but it feels very natural for us.

The new EP and live shows sound like you're moving into using tape loops and things.

Chris: Yeah, definitely, but it's not like we listened to something new on Moonshine.

No Fatboy Slim remixes?

Chris: No, nothing like that. We're getting into more instrumentation and from that, getting more into the technology side of music and equipment to do the things we want to do instead of adding new members. When people see us when we play live, we're playing with some prerecorded music and some loops and some samples. It's not as much that we're going into some type of electronica, we're just utilizing today's technology to play the type of music that we want to. Like another instrument.

Chris: Yeah, exactly. With "False Cathedrals," it's definitely mixed in

ELLIOTT

with the songs a bit more, and allows us to work in different tones and sounds than normal instruments such as piano and strings and stuff that we're not able to pull off in a live setting.

Not without the Boston Philharmonic.

Chris: Yeah. If we had a chance, we could really do something with that.

You'd probably make them work harder than they usually do. So what kind of equipment are you using?

Chris: How we're doing it right now is we have our own studio upstairs and it's run by Kevin. It's pretty much his baby.

Kevin is the second guitarist, right?

Chris: Actually, Kevin's our drummer. Jay plays second guitar on "False Cathedrals" and Jonathan plays bass.

Was Jay with the band for "U.S. Songs?"

Chris: Yeah. The only reason I say for "False Cathedrals" is because about three weeks ago he left the band.

That's a shame. He seems like a hell of a guitarist.

Chris: Oh, he's an amazing guy, amazing guitarist. We've all been together for about five years now, so he was part of the family and just an amazing, integral part of our live set. Things will definitely change. This album is kind of a rebirth anyway, but now with someone new who's going to have to be coming into the band with us, it's definitely going to be a different situation.

What happened?

Chris: I think lifestyle situations with his personal life and also, he was definitely the one that brought in a lot more of the more aggressive, faster, edge and I think maybe he wanted to pursue that further instead of lacking our writing with that. I think he might want to concentrate a bit more on that type of music. I don't want to put words in his mouth.

So it sounds like it was amicable.

Chris: Oh definitely. There's no ill will or anything like that. It's a sad thing for us and not something we would have wished for, but I think in the long run, it'll make everybody happier. What we were talking about? **We were on technology before that digression.**

Chris: Basically, we're just using samplers, and then Kevin's got an arsenal of old drum machines and stuff like that, but he also has a Roland, actually a Yamaha electronic kit, and he has two Roland 1680s which are basically all digital recording units which have 16 tracks apiece, so he's got 32 tracks. It's basically two mini-computers specially

built for recording. So he's got that and then a lot of guitar effects and piano and keyboards and all that stuff. That's what makes it fun. You get in there and hook this up with that and start trying to create new sounds and you can get very into it. You can indulge yourself a bit too much with it

sometimes and play with one tone for three hours and still not like it and scrap it and move on to something else, but that's what keeps us going. Musically, we just keep trying to push ourselves. I don't think we're pushing the envelope for other people, but as long as we are for our standards, then we're satisfied with what we're doing.

Well, you also have the studio already. It's not like you're booking studio time and spending money on it and frustrating engineers as you play with effects.

Chris: Yeah, definitely. We can do that on our own time and then go in and do that when it's time to record the album. We recorded the EPs here, but when it came down to recording a full-length, we wanted to go somewhere else so that we were a little separated from some of the distractions at home, so we actually went out to L.A. for a month and recorded out there. You always learn new things and new ways of doing things and I think that'll probably change for the next time that we go out. We won't spend as much time away because it definitely drains you. We probably didn't spend less than 14 hours a day for a month at the studio, and being in L.A. is just overwhelming sometimes.

As close as I live to L.A., I still don't like it very much.

Chris: Yeah. You're a fairly safe distance away in San Diego. You can travel there and get away from it pretty fast.

Not fast enough for my liking.

Chris: It's an interesting, odd place. I've always said there are a few places in the world that I wouldn't want to live unless there are certain situations going on, and L.A. is definitely one of them.

It pretty much tops my list as well.

Chris: You have to have crazy amounts of money to live there comfortably and it just messes with your perception, or at least mine when we're there for any amount of time.

Back to the music, I remember how you led into "Watermark High" when I saw you live with tape loops and reverb. Is that the direction you're going in on "False Cathedrals"?

Chris: There's different songs and different

Well, when I left my former residence ...

Dave: Ah, say no more.

Well, I made a decision not to have a TV because I didn't want to come home from work, turn it on and do nothing. I wanted to come home and read and write.

Dave: A TV will suck you right in, it really will. Last night, I came home from rehearsal, I sat down and I had every intention of reading my Jefferson book which I'm really into right now, but I turned on the TV and stayed up until 2:30, just watching nothing. That's why I didn't want a TV. I don't have a VCR which means I can't watch movies, but on the other hand, they're on video and sooner or later, I may decide I've had enough of life without a TV.

Dave: Well, what you can do is get TV and not have cable so your choices are instantly narrowed down to 5 or 6 stations as well as a VCR. That kind of limits your options. The thing with cable is you can flip the damn thing for an hour before you've even gotten to the end of the cycle because you spend 5 minutes on each thing, get bored and go on to the next thing. You can easily spend half an hour flipping all the way up and then start over again, because maybe there's something or now. The programs have all changed. When you don't have cable, that really stops that.

To my way of thinking, I'm basically kicking everything out of my life that I regard as a bad influence.

Dave: Well, that's good, but again, it's like we were talking about earlier in this conversation, a little bit of something, in moderation, is not always a bad thing. It doesn't mean it's a good thing, but it can be not a bad thing.

Well, it's like the Greek philosophy - "All things in moderation." A glass of wine or two a night is actually good for the heart.

Dave: Exactly. The same thing goes with TV. If you sit there and become a vegetable to it, it can be really bad, but if you watch it and have fun and are still a creative person, then it can be good. I like watching A & E "Biography." I like "Seinfeld." I'm a huge "Seinfeld" fan. I think "Seinfeld" is great.

One of these days, I'm going to put together a list of things people didn't know about you and print all this stuff.

Dave: That's a pretty minor one there. "Seinfeld" gets a pretty big priority on Thursday nights in our household. It's a funny, funny show.

Going back to "Radio Raggs," back in December I went on a road trip with a

friend of mine and all we had for music was this tape of Down By Law songs.

Anyway, the car broke down twice, he bused home from Elk City on New Year's Eve, and I nursed my car back to San Diego, watching New Mexico sunsets for three and four hours listening to that song and it was perfect. I was down, I was about \$500 in debt, I was trying to meet up with the woman I was engaged to, and that line "The modern world just kicked our ass" was the killer for me, but overall it made me feel better.

Dave: That's good. That makes me very happy. That's the kind of stuff that makes me suck it in the next time we play a show and have horrible sound or a tiny audience or get discouraged or have problems with the record label or whatever, those are the kind of things I remember.

There were four more songs I wanted to talk to you about. "Concrete Times"

seems to address things we've been discussing like growing up and losing innocence, faith and hope and seeing this gray, bleak world around you. "The Last Goodbye" struck me as a song about losing friendships, relationships, things of that nature. "Self-Destruction" also seemed downbeat but seemed to wind up on a positive note and the only reason I can say that is because of the line, "Nobody makes it on their own," which, to me, indicates this collective spirit of punk which I grew up with and which I think you grew up with as well, like someone's hand picking you up in the pit.

Dave: Right. Well, that's definitely one way to view it. Again, what's beautiful about music is that it has its own meanings and it has more meanings than the writer can ever have intended to each person. Joe Strummer didn't know that some 16-year-old kid in Virginia, years after he'd written and performed the songs, was going to be listening to "Police and Thieves," or his version of it anyway, or "White Man in Hammerhead Palace" or "I'm So Bored With The USA" and having his own life changed by those songs even though they're very topical and very English and all these things. He didn't know that when he wrote it, he probably didn't have any of the images in his head that I do when I hear those songs but those are my songs. They're not just his anymore. They're mine too and that's the beautiful thing about great songs or perceptive listeners or both. When you write a song, it's everybody's song. As a

Dave: Oh, believe me, the only way you can deal with something like this is to laugh and make it part of the Down By Law mythology. It really is. For people who are real fans of the band, they know. They read the liner notes and they see the band on tour and they know. We can't hide it so we might as well laugh about it.

Mythology. That sounds like there's more to this story than just drummers. That's Zeus and company.

Dave: You could probably put an analogy together that would work fairly well in this case, but then I'd have to start assigning godhead to different people in the band and that would get me in trouble so I better not. Plus, figuring out the whole thing about Leda and the swan would be a real mess.

Dave: I don't know that. What is that? Zeus basically wanted to have sex with this mortal woman so he assumed the form of a swan.

Dave: Okay. The story progressed from there.

Dave: Oh, okay. I don't know that one. I think it's in Edith Hamilton's

"Mythology."

Dave: I love Greek myths, but I don't remember them all. I haven't brushed up on them lately.

That was always one of my favorite ones. I don't know why. Actually, one of the other things I wanted to know about was "Question Marks and Periods." That's one of the most intriguing songs I've seen you write.

Dave: That's the first single actually. We're here this weekend doing a video for that one.

I was looking at it and I couldn't figure out if you had been reading up on socio-linguistics or what exactly was going on with this because I've never seen a Down By Law song like this. It's almost opaque. It's hard to read it.

Dave: Once again, you've really got your finger on the pulse of the song. It's so refreshing to talk to you about this because it's really interesting to hear such close to the mark perspectives on these songs. It's really nice. But yeah, it is opaque. It is about a very specific subject but unfortunately, I can't really get into the specifics of what the subject is, at least on the record, but what I can do is say it's a song with the idea of someone who keeps trying to give something to someone and keeps trying and working hard to do something nice and good and right, and the other party or parties are

non-receptive, and it's a pat on the head and "Oh, what a nice boy," and they aren't listening, but then finally things turn around and what you were trying to give is in demand and so then they decide to take it, but that's when you say "Too late, you had your chance and blew it. I'm not going to give it to you anymore." That's the idea, trying and trying and trying and somebody finally does it when it's right for them, but not right for you anymore, then you take it back and say "Forget it," or give it to them with strings attached that weren't there before. That could apply to so many things. I was just thinking about a relationship I was involved in and also about the business deals that I'm sure have been going on in the wake of the Offspring.

Dave: Suffice it to say you're not far off the mark in that.

Okay. Next question. I'm not criticizing you, I want to make that clear from the outset, but I thought you said you weren't going to make another music video.

Dave: Um, if I did say that, I probably shouldn't have, or maybe I meant it at the time. I don't know I said. I don't remember what I said two minutes ago sometimes. I thought you said it in "True Music."

Dave: People got the idea of that. The idea of "True Music" was not so much to say that it's a bad thing to make a music video. The idea of "True Music" was to say it's a bad thing to get consumed with what it all represents, in thinking that's going to make you a star and forgetting that you should be doing this for a little bit of fun and artistic satisfaction. If the other stuff happens, that's fine, but don't make that a goal. That was the idea of "True Music," and a lot of people mistook that. It was not meant to be an anti-video song. It was just meant to be anti-getting caught up with it song.

Then I don't need to ask the question. I knew you had made videos before.

Dave: Did you see the one for "Radio Ragga"?

I never saw that, but I have a story for you about that song.

Dave: Let me just tell you that it's a beautiful, beautiful video, and not beautiful because we had anything to do with it but beautiful because the directors, who are also directing the next one tomorrow, are really outstanding directors. They're young guys and they're brimming with ideas and they really love the band. It is a work of art. It really is, and I'm so proud of it. Ask Jeff to send you a copy.

moods to the album, but we're definitely trying to create a wider sound for it. You're challenging yourselves.

Chris: Challenging ourselves, yeah. I'm trying to find the right words. I guess it would be a little bit more along those lines. We kind of spread out the guitars so it's not just a full on wall of distortion. Sometimes, with some of the heavier rock stuff we were doing, it all comes around and you usually get hit by that wall, but we've definitely tried to concentrate on the songs and give them a life of their own instead of all of us playing for ourselves or for our particular guitar part or bass part or drum part. We've just really concentrated on the songs and letting them go where they need to go, if that makes any sense.

Well, if I'm understanding you right, you're talking about dynamics.

"Watermark High" is my favorite Elliott song because it starts off with these soft vocals and then comes crushing in with this wall of guitar.

Chris: Yeah, the dynamics just hit you. There's definitely still those points to this album and we just tried to make the dynamics not as obvious sometimes. There's a bit more ear candy within the recording. We tried to throw in things that maybe a few months later, you're listening to it on earphones and go, "Wait a minute, I didn't even hear that guitar part before." That little noise that pans from left to right, we did a lot of that with the recording which was fun for us, but in the songwriting itself, we still carry along that same type of emotion and attitude that we bring to the songs.

For me, the best albums are the one that let me hear something new every time I listen to it.

Chris: The best things for me are the albums by the artists that I trust. I don't particularly like their albums the first time that I listen to them, if that makes any sense. Fugazi is a good example for me. I'll get an album and I'll listen to it and I'll be like, "Man, I don't know if I like it. I know I'm going to like it in a month, but right now I'm not sure if I really dig it." Then I listen to it four or five times and I'm addicted to it. I can't get away from it and those are the records. When I hear it and I go, "Okay, I know it's there, I've just got to figure out where they're coming from." There's only a few people that do that and hopefully this record will come across that way sometimes, but if it's immediately accessible then that would be okay too. I'm glad you mentioned Fugazi. When I first heard Elliott, I was hearing emo, a

little bit of jazz, Fugazi and Embrace and some of the other D.C. punk. What other kind of styles influenced your music? Chris: Probably a little bit of everything. At that point, with "U.S. Songs," Kevin was actually taking some jazz classes at the college he was at, but everything we listen to. I listen to more of your D.C.-influenced post-rock stuff, Jay was way into the 80's and new wave.

Like 80's hardcore, or Duran Duran and Flock of Seagulls?

Chris: More like Duran Duran. We did a Chameleons cover at his suggestion. He was the guy that would put the tape into the car and we'd be driving and every song, we're like, "Who's this? Who's this?" We got educated every time he had the road mix on.



So he was the record geek of the band. Chris: Definitely, definitely. Yeah, he's got the ongoing record collection. It was a joke for a while because every time we went on tour, all his food money would go to buying records. Then Jonathan would listen to everybody from The Beatles to Coltrane to Into Another and Kevin is all over the place too. It's just a really wide range and that's what we're always looking for. It's not to say that's the kind of music we're going to be playing, and it's naturally focused on certain points, but it's a really strong thing for us not to be like, "We can't play that kind of song because it's not us." If it's good and it's the way we feel and what we want to do, then we're going to do it whether it's acoustic guitar or a full on assault or just piano and vocals or no vocals at all. Whatever we decide to do, I want to have the freedom to do it because I think that's what shuts down and puts the end to a lot of bands. They just don't see themselves growing anymore, or they feel like they have to stop and do something else and then they're done. My hope is that we can take each of our influences and mold it into what we're doing instead of saying "Let's just focus this band

on this sound," and then we'll start another band and focus it on something else.

So you want to be able to take over the map. You want to be able to take these influences and see if you can make them fit in the song structures.

Chris: Exactly. And do it in a natural way, so we're not straining it. Sometimes it might not even be obvious, but it's our interpretation of that.

So you aren't turning into a post-punk folk/jazz band overnight and confusing the hell out of everybody.

Chris: Yeah, and everybody's like, "What the hell?" It probably comes across as just one thing and that's fine.

I just have to say that Jonathan is an amazing bass player.

Chris: Yeah, he's definitely a natural. He was originally a guitar player and he still considers himself a guitar player, which is funny, but as I've always told him, the things that he naturally decides to play and the way that he plays, not to be silly, but just from his soul, everything is fairly smooth and it just works.

Do you think there's any progression from Falling Forward to Elliott?

Chris: Originally, there were three people from Falling Forward in Elliott. The drummer, Ben Lord, who left the band after about a year to go to school. Jonathan and myself. You can't get away from my vocals, or at least the tonal quality of my voice. I can't really change that. I can try to improve on it and I can try to reach new dynamics and push myself, but I think there's definitely a progression. I just really wanted to get away from the lyrical content that always pushed me into the same corner where I was always having to drag up the same emotions for the same song and beat it to death and I found that it was very hard on me and the song would lend itself only in one way for me, so then I started trying to write in a way that I could come at it from different directions. I was at a point where looking at it one way was bringing me down or getting stale for me, and I definitely didn't want that. I wanted to be able to come from a different place when needed so I could give people what they should be seeing within a song.

I know it's a bit of a topic change, but I'm curious to know how Louisville affects your music. It does at all.

Chris: It definitely does, more in the way of letting us do what we need to do without a lot of outside influences. I couldn't really imagine myself living in L.A. or New York

and trying to do the same things because I think I would just get sidetracked by everything and maybe other motives would push me in different directions, which is not always a bad thing, but I think it can definitely hinder what comes from us, which is a little bit more pure, I hope. We like to think of Louisville as an island. When you think of Kentucky, you don't really think of a state with much culture, but we've definitely got things going on here. We're also able to separate ourselves and that's definitely a big help and big influence for us. There are amazing musicians and a lot of amazing bands right now.

Squirrel Bait and Slint, among other bands, came from Louisville, didn't they?

Chris: Yeah, and then all those bands spawned so many other ones. King Kong, Squirrel Bait, Slint, all those bands either influenced significantly, or actual members went into all these different bands and became something else. From there, you can kind of see who was into what and what kids were doing what. The whole progression is fairly interesting, and then there's the Chicago connection which has created a very strong scene within the more indie stuff. Palace and Rodan and The Rachels. Shipping News are actually recording right now, down the street from us, so it's a pretty great place because of that. I don't know if it's only because I've lived here, but it seems like a really easy place to live, economically. You can get pretty much everywhere from here fairly fast. It's not centrally located, but you can get to the East Coast when you need to and jump down South. You can feel like you're in the South within a couple of hours drive. It just makes for a good place.

Plus, you're in the state where Jim Beam is distilled.

Chris: That's right. Wild Turkey just had a big fire and I don't know how much they lost, but it went into the Kentucky River and started killing all the fish. They had to start pumping oxygenated water into the river to save some of these fish. It's just a big mess. There have been a few of these fires and they just get out of control because they have all those distilleries and they have them all close together. It just gets out of hand.

I've been dreading talking about the lyrics. I just can't make sense of them. I can get feelings and general ideas, but nothing specific. It's almost like reading Faulkner. First of all, what's the process? How do you go about writing the songs

streets of Washington or another city if I'm on tour somewhere and it rains and I see everybody else running. It happened in Tokyo actually, when we were in Japan. Here I was, in Japan, and it was this incredibly cool city. Tokyo is a great city, packed with people and everybody was scurrying and running and I was just like, "This is a glorious time." I just walked through the streets and I got completely soaked, but it was this nice feeling, like here I was, and it was raining and I was one with the city. It was a really nice feeling.

I'd hesitate to call "Burning Heart" downright - there are a couple of lines about loneliness - it seems like it's more consoling and reassuring, that everything will be all right in the end.

Dave: That's exactly the feeling that I wanted a listener to have.

That leaves a question about the line, "Have you got a hope for me to steal?"

Dave: Well, you know, that is sort of leaving it on a bit of a downer, but the idea is that you feel all this romance but sometimes at the end of the day, you still want something more. Let's say you're out on the streets at night by yourself and you're drinking and all this wonderful stuff, but you get back home and maybe you still do want to have someone there waiting for you or you do want to have something happen that didn't happen that night. Sometimes there is still a sense of longing, even though you have a sense of contentment as well, there's still a longing.

Now that you have a family, your band is doing well, do you still get that sense when you're walking around?

Dave: Oh yeah, I think so, just because I'm such a political creature. I will always be that knight with a lance, looking for windmills, I always will, because I see them everywhere. To me, I don't want a perfect society, like "No Equalizer" says, but that doesn't mean I won't keep striving for one. It's kind of a dichotomy I guess, but I feel like there are always going to be battles that I want to fight, that I think are important.

I mean this in the best possible way, but that is the most wonderfully self-defeating sentiment I've heard expressed.

"I don't want a perfect world but I'm going to keep struggling for one anyway."

Dave: Yeah, I suppose it sounds a bit self-defeating but that's how I feel, I guess. That's a wonderful way to put it though. If I didn't have anything to struggle against, I'd get bored. If I didn't have windmills to

tilt at or flocks of sheep to plow into or a gang of merchants to beat up and pretend they're grave robbers, I don't know where I'd be.

Dave: Exactly right. Yeah. It's a wonderful and twisted world and the world of ideas, once you get into that realm, is very intricate and oftentimes a confusing place, but that's part of why it's great.

Have you done any more teaching?

Dave: No, I haven't. The band's doing pretty well, and in terms of the schedule, we're extremely busy, so I haven't done that. I would like to at some point, but I can't see that happening for a long time. We just signed a three-record deal with Epicaph, so it looks like we're going to be with them for a while and as long as that's going on, we'll probably be grounded for the next few years. We have a solid base of things to deal with. Did you ever find someone to take

Danny's place?

Dave: Our new drummer, of this particular five-minute period, is Milo. He's an outstanding drummer. One of the things that's funny about Down By Law is everybody always says, "You guys go through a drummer every year," and it's true. Actually, this is drummer #6 and I started the band in 1990, so this will just be about one a year. It's 6 if you include Colin because Colin only drummed for one tour, that's Colin from Dag Nasty, and that was really just to help me out, but in any case, you can count him as 6. Anyway, all of them, without exception, have been excellent drummers and it's so funny because friends of ours in other bands call up and ask if we have cast-offs from our last audition process. Not cast-offs, you know what I mean, people who didn't make it or whatever. We've just been really fortunate that we've had outstanding drummers, even if they don't last, even if they explode like Spinal Tap. I think it's also because all of us, I'll exclude myself, but everybody in the band is very good at what they do. The level of musicianship in DBL is very high. That's one of the things I'm most demanding of, I guess. Clearly when Milo auditioned, we tried out a ton of guys, he was hands-down the best guy. He's such a great drummer and I really hope he lasts. I always hope they last. It's funny, because every time they start to really become part of the band, something happens. Giffenheads or burnout or fighting or whatever it is and they don't last. I always do hope that they last and I hope Milo lasts. I wasn't going to mention Spinal Tap, I was thinking it.

away because they were that good. They were so good and so special. I miss bands like Pegboy, I miss bands like Naked Raygun. I miss bands that didn't emphasize fart jokes in songs. Dave: Yeah, yeah. You know what it is, those bands were writing from the heart and that's really important.

"Here I sit at 25/ The best part of my life gone by/ Wish I could go back again/ Go back over and start again."

Dave: Yeah, exactly. That's a heartfelt lyric and it's thoughtful.

Now, "No Equalizer" really seems to tie into the album title because, and this is just what I was getting from it, but it almost seemed like you were arguing that you didn't want a perfect world because there would be nothing left to struggle against. There would be nothing left to define yourself against, like saying "This is bad, so I have to do this because I identify this as a better choice than the alternative. This conflicts with my moral and ethical ideals and I want to do something different so I'm going to choose a different path." It seemed like what you were saying is that in someone else's perfect world, the only thing left to rebel against would be their concept of a perfect world.

Dave: Yeah, I think that's about right. I got a little bit lost as you were going through it, to be honest, but what you said in the beginning was right. I don't want a perfect world because that would be a really boring place. There wouldn't be any rebellion left, there wouldn't be any challenges left, there wouldn't be any mountains to climb. There wouldn't be any thrills of success as well as the agony of defeat. It's like the last line of the song says, "It takes a bit of piss to put the spice in victory." All the struggles that you personally have been through in this last year, when things go on an upswing, which they will because they always do because life goes in cycles, that's going to make that so much nicer when things start to come together. That's sort of the idea of that song. I know you've done a lot of struggling in your life, whether it be against the status quo or things you see as bad, and in various arenas like punk rock and politics. Do you feel like your life has been defined by opposition, like you carved out who you are based on what you're opposed to?

Dave: I suppose that's a part of it, but I've always been defining who I am by what I'm

for as well. I'm not just a contrary songwriter who's pissed off about everything. There's love songs on most Down By Law records. Hopefully, at least on some level, there's a degree of optimism tempered with a degree of anger. I think it's sort of like the songwriting. It's not enough to just write a song. You have to work hard at it and do it right, but by the same token, it's not enough just to be angry. You have to have things you're supporting as well or else you might as well go start a revolution and kill everybody. You might as well go down on the street like the guys with the guns in the bank robbery and just start shooting at people. After all, if you're angry at everything, then nothing is good. It's kind of the opposite theme of "No Equalizer." "No Equalizer" is saying don't wish for everything to be lily-white, but at the same time, don't wish for everything to be jet black. Life can be good and fun and beautiful and love and laughter and all kinds of things. Life can be great.

That's one of the things I was getting off of "Burning Heart."

Dave: Well, you'll be happy to know we're doing five songs off the record live and that's going to be one of them. I didn't want to come out and just do our new songs and not play any of our old ones. I hate it when bands do that. I made a conscious decision to do five songs from this new one. We're doing fifteen songs total, but that's going to be one of the five.

I just love the couplets, like "There's romance on the streets tonight/ And every lonely heart's all right." It's reassuring. When I got the album, I was riding my bike and I'd see people like this guy who wears a CalTrans vest and screams about Armageddon and sin and I'd think about that.

Dave: It's romantic in its own way. It really is. It's beautiful in its own little way and that's okay. That guy being there is somewhat poetic, even though he probably wouldn't even know it.

That's the romance on the streets. As much as I hate to say it, it reminds me of the Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Under The Bridge" - "The city, she loves me."

Dave: Yeah, and you know the last line is "Pouring rain all around me but I don't care." It's harder for Southern Californians to identify with that line, but many is the time that I've walked through the streets, and sometimes you run because you don't want to get wet, but sometimes I walk through the

and determining what lyrics go in and what, if anything, the lyrics are about? Chris: The EPs started the process of trying to get things a little more clear and make it a little more obvious what I was talking about. With "U.S. Songs," I think it goes back to when I made a conscious effort to write in a way that I could come in different directions at it so it wouldn't become stale for me. It always had some type of underlying meaning for me, but it allowed me little exits so if I needed to get out of that thought for a while, I could. The writing process for us always came down to the music first, then the melody line for me, vocally, and then the lyrics would naturally come in after that. Now with "False Cathedral," I think you'll see that you can kind of tell what they're all about or get a little bit stronger feeling on them, but that's usually how it goes. If there's particular



songs, I might be able to point out what it's about or certain lines or stuff like that. Sometimes they would come from multiple situations that had some type of underlying themes that worked together.

My favorite Elliott songs are "Watermark High," "Intro," "Miracle," "Sultcase and Atoms" and "Alchemy as a Rhythm." The general feeling is that it seems like you're looking back on things that happened, maybe with regret, maybe looking at how they changed you as a person and maybe how they changed your perception of what's going to come. I get a sense of hope, but not overriding hope, just a glimmer that things might get better.

Chris: I'd say that's pretty accurate. That's kind of how I live my life. I know things are going to be okay, but I don't exactly how they're going to work. I have this underlying feeling that we're going to make it through whatever problems come. A lot of the songs probably are tainted with that. "Watermark"

was just filled with all this imagery. I guess when I was writing that I had this fascination with water and it's probably because I'm not on one of the coasts where I can really get a sense for the ocean, so it really intrigues me. What we do have is the river, so that's the closest thing I've got and just the fascination with breathing in water and drowning, but not just wanting to be absorbed into it. It was mixing in all those types of images and the feeling of being at one with that, but it's also something calming, something making you want to disappear within that, and I think that stems from friendships and going astray. It probably had a lot to do with the Louisville community, maybe not the community but the set of people that were around me at that time. It was just all over the place. There was a lot, just like there is every place, of

talk and gossip and friends and not friends. You know how it all works. The politics of living I guess. I think a lot of those images and that feeling were put into that song. "Sultcase, atoms, allow us to get by" is one of the most curious lines I've ever heard in a song. What did you mean by that?

Chris: Basically, that song is kind of my tribute to the whole concept of the band and traveling. As long as we were alive and able to keep doing this, we could just pack up, go, and keep moving and traveling, meeting new people, seeing new things and playing music, and things would be okay. That's basically what that song was about. It was one song that I tried to make a little clearer, using language to make it just a bit off, but that one doesn't get too deep for me, except the fact that it's a real important thing. That whole album had a lot to do with us traveling and being the first band that I got to see the country with, and so it influenced us a lot to

be able to do that.

Yeah, I never really got the feeling that the songs were about romantic relationships. It always seemed like they were more about living and the people you meet.

Chris: Definitely. "False Cathedrals" might be a bit more about romantic relationships, but it was definitely more about life, struggles and the people you meet, and not concentrating on just one focal point. There are definitely some parts of life that you're able to get away from, a lot of things. That was one time when I spent a good part of a year, right after 1995 or so, working. I rode my bike, I think, and I went out to this quarry and that's what I did for about six months so I didn't have too many other distractions and I was able to get away from everybody and rethink what had gone on over the past couple of years.

So what inspires you to play music? What inspires Elliott's music?

Chris: What inspires me is a bit of everything, from the process to the outcome, what it allows us to do. It's one thing that I've found that I can express myself and that allows me to get across and to reach people in a way that I've wanted to but could never figure out how to do it. In school, I was trying to concentrate on writing or straight art or whatever and it just never came across because it always felt like I kind of needed to be there somehow and music was one way for me to do that. It definitely wasn't something I think that was in the cards for me. I think, speaking solely for myself, there's definitely more ambition there than musical talent because I have to fight for everything that I'm doing, whether it's playing guitar, singing or whatnot. I really have to work on it. I think it's what a lot of punk comes from, the work ethic and the feeling that you should be doing it. I know so many people that can play guitar better and sing better, but there's something else calling them to do what they're doing, and for some reason this feels like what I'm supposed to be doing. What inspires Elliott would probably be the individual members' reasons for doing it, and all of ours come together. I think for us, the main thing now comes from the actual songs and wanting to perfect some type of craft to the best of our ability and reaching people while doing that is probably our main motivation.

On a final note, where did the name come from?

Chris: We just wanted something very

nondescript, something that wouldn't paint us into a corner, and I figured what's better to do than a real name? Everybody comes up with these names and most names, if you think about them, you start thinking it's the stupidest name I've ever heard, but you see the band and like the band and it really doesn't matter what the name is. That's what a lot of it comes down to. It just came down to thinking of naming it like we would name a child. That was pretty much it, it was just a name. It did come from a friend of mine who had just had twins, a boy and a girl named Elliott and Nixon, Elliott being the girl. We just wrote down a bunch of names and I wrote down their names and it ended up that everybody wanted to go with it. I think it turned out that there was actually a band called Nixon either at the time or close to it, so it made for an easy choice. We definitely had names that got shot down, but at the time, it was a really important thing for us not to get stuck in a corner because we really felt like we, in the past band that three of us were in at that point, couldn't really move much to the right or much to the left without people wondering what we were doing. It might have been more what we were putting on ourselves than what people were putting on us, or the musical climate at the time or whatever it was, but a lot of the steps and a lot of the decisions we made were to do whatever we wanted so no one could say or expect otherwise. There was definitely a feeling that we were expected, if we did something again with music, to go in one way and we wanted to make sure that it was set up so we could do whatever we wanted to do.

Leave your options open.

Chris: Yeah.

And I thought it was a stupid question.

Chris: No, not at all. It's an important one to every band. Everyone picks what they do for a reason, and if they analyze it enough, which I have a problem of doing, they'll figure it out.

I thought it was going to be something like, "We named it after the kid in 'E.T.'"

Chris: Oh yeah. It could be named after him, or "Pete's Dragon." There are so many of them. I've actually started collecting different shirts that have nothing to do with the band but that have Elliott on them. If you go to any, at least in this part of the country, fair or flea market, there are race car shirts everywhere that say Elliott, spelled exactly the same way in disgusting fonts with race cars coming at you.

is not to put down working at Office Depot, if that's what you wanted to do, that would be great, but I do not think you should be working at Office Depot 20 years from now. I don't want to be working there a year from now. [Addendum: I quit in September. The interview was in July, 10 months ahead of schedule.]

Dave: I worked all through college. I was lucky because I had parents who were completely supportive and paid my tuition and books and housing, but I had to work to pay for anything else. If I wanted to go to the movies or whatever, all that money I had to get for myself. I worked all through college, all through high school too. My parents definitely have that Scotch work ethic. I worked as a busboy in high school, then at Newbury Comics all through college. The first semester of college, I worked in the dishroom as a dishwasher, but the point is that I had to work and it definitely sucked and it took time away from studying and other things and fun, but I got through it. Granted, I didn't have to completely support myself, but you can do it and I know other kids who have. It's a big pain in the ass, but you might have to try and I think the longer you're away from college, the harder it's going to be to get back.

At least I graduated.

Dave: Oh, you did. Well, at least you're done with the first part. This is for your master's? I'd be going back for my teaching credential. I actually graduated with a double major in English and American Studies.

Dave: Oh, that's great. Maybe I'm wrong, but if you have a B.A., can't you apply for jobs at private schools?

Probably so.

Dave: You have to have your credentials for public teaching, but I think if you have a B.A., private schools don't have to have a credential, but of course if you have it, it can open up some doors.

I had already done most of the work. All I had left was student teaching.

Dave: All the more reason. Don't stop now.

Do whatever it takes, within reason. Suffer for maybe a year.

Don't go out and sell crack.

Dave: No, no, I wouldn't want you to do that. Now, sort of getting back to the music, when I first heard the title, I thought of that line in "The Wild Bunch" - "We gotta learn to think beyond our guns. Those days are closing fast." Then I started thinking about it another way, as the last

of a dying breed. Which is it? Is it literally learning to think beyond guns, although I don't think it's that literal, or being one of the last holdouts of punk?

Dave: I think it's more towards the latter. Some people have been thinking that it's more the former because of the references to guns in the songs, but it wasn't meant to invoke that. It was meant to invoke the gunfight at the OK Corral or Custer's Last Stand or these kinds of things, the image of a guy fighting against all odds and probably ultimately losing. I think every person, man or woman, boy or girl, or whoever it is has that feeling sometimes, like nobody understands what your personal struggle or your belief is and you still want to fight for it, even though you might not win and feel like you're all alone sometimes and no one understands. In a musical sense, I see so many generic hardcore bands, some of which have very swift success, and I don't feel competition with them. I don't even really know most of their music. I see a loss of craftsmanship in songwriting, at least in my universe, and I see a rise of simplistic "go for the laugh" kind of songwriting. Go for the 16-year-old, or what they think the 16-year-old's rage against their parents is. Those to me are way too easy and don't involve songwriting - a bit of skill, a bit of craft. To me, you have to work hard at your skill. You have to be a good writer if you're going to be a writer. You have to work at it. It's not enough to just put out a fanzine, you have to make it a great fanzine. It's not enough to put out an album of songs. You have to be a good songwriter. Don't try to write songs if you're not going too try to do your best to make great songs. For me, I feel like Down By Law, with its emphasis on musicianship and songwriting, is kind of a dying breed. There are bands out there - Bad Religion, Pegboy, Wayne Kramer - there are definitely bands out there that are amazing, that write great songs and great lyrics that I love, but sometimes I feel there are less of us.

I'm so happy you mentioned Pegboy. I thought I was the only person who remembered them anymore.

Dave: Oh no, they're a great band. I don't even know if they still exist.

I don't know, I've got all the albums they put out though.

Dave: We played with them about two years ago in St. Louis, our only time that we ever played there. I don't know that they blew us off the stage that night, but they sure blew my mind away. They probably did blow us

words 7-11 in it. I started to write that song when I was at 7-11 and I saw how rude people were to the guy behind the counter and it made me think that here was a guy who has his family, his own dreams and hopes, and maybe this is the accomplishment he always wanted or maybe this is something terrible that he never wanted, but he has his own story and it's no better or worse than mine or yours or anyone else's and yet he's just the guy behind the counter and nobody ever smiles. Like the song says, "Who's got time for courtesy?" It made me think, and I'm sure that I've been guilty of that as well at times. Since I wrote that song, I've tried to be a little more conscious of how I deal with people.

Yeah. I work at Office Depot on weekends and every weekend, someone will come in and be rude to me or yell at me because their job was screwed up or something like that, and I have to smile and be polite and make it right for them, no matter what they do.

Dave: There's that which is awful, when they're overtly rude, but then there's the indifference, like looking away as you're ringing them up, handing you the money and not even looking at you. Things like that. That, to me, is just as insulting. You're beneath their radar.

Dave: Exactly. That's really too bad. Hopefully that song may make us all a bit more reflective.

The thing that grabbed me about it, and this has popped up a few times in your music, is that you told a story, like you did in "All American." You basically related a story about someone whose dreams weren't exactly working out, but who still had them and maybe this person would get through, maybe they wouldn't, maybe they'd get stuck there all their life. That seemed to be a pervasive tone on this album, like on "No One Gets Away," "Last Goodbye," "Concrete Times." It seems there's this downbeat tone, like getting ground down by the system, which is also something we've talked about before. It seems more prevalent on this album.

Dave: Wow. You know, when I write my autobiography, you're going to have to write the introduction or something because you have really nice insights into the songs I do, more so than almost anybody I've ever talked to, so take that as a compliment. Yeah, there is that, and I was concerned that it was too much of a downer, but it's

thoughtful downerism and it's not, ultimately, defeatist downerism, I hope. I think a lot of people who are in their mid-20s or above will really identify with some of these songs.

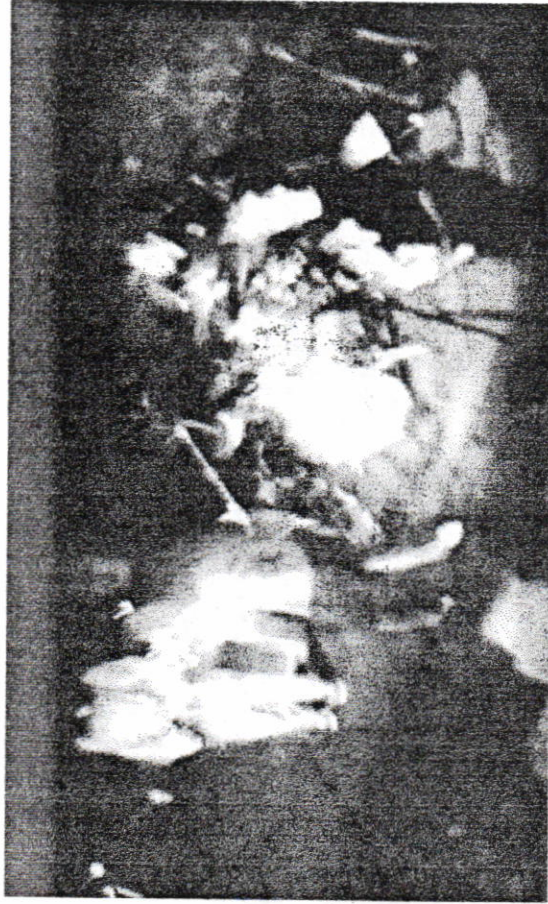
There is a sense of trying desperately to keep hold of what you believe in, even as life's realities weigh down on you. The third song on this record, "Call to Arms," I think that's my favorite song on this record and the point of that song is to have two perspectives, both of which I understand and identify with at this point in my life. The first guy is saying, "Look, you can have dreams, you can have hopes, you can have aspirations, but you also have to pay rent. You have to be smart. You can't just be this idealist. You have to accept the fact that, in order to live like a normal person in a normal society, you have to make some compromises sometimes. You can't be Don Quixote, tilting at windmills. Don't forget your past, but you have to also be real and smart." Then he says, "If you could only see things my way, then you'd know I'm right."

The other side basically comes back and says, "I understand that, but I still have this fire inside me and I'm not sure quite what to do about it. Yes, I want the big TV also, but I still want to play only all-ages shows with ticket prices at six or seven dollars." He's not saying that in the song, but the idea is that the ideals are still there and trying to reconcile that with knowing that you have to save money, knowing that you have to live as nicely as you can. It is a dichotomy and it is different, and then at the end of the verse, he too says, "If you could only see things my way, then you'd know I'm right." The point of the song is that they're both right and both perspectives are valid. To me, you could say that song sums up all the ideas you were just discussing.

I think a lot of the reason why these songs hit me so hard is because of what I've been through in the last year or so. I've been exposed to everything I was afraid of. I got tossed out of my house, had to find a job, a place, etc., and take care of everything in the matter of a week. I'm working two jobs to make ends meet and I don't know if I'll ever make it back to school to be a teacher which is what I've wanted to do for years.

Dave: That's what you should do. Right, but how can I do that and still pay rent? College adds money and takes time. It's the grind.

Dave: Go part-time, take out full-on student loans. I don't think that you, and again, this



Down By Law, more than any other band, has helped me through the past few years and offered me unflinching hope at a time when I had none left. I routinely try to explain what Dave Smalley's music means to me and I fail just as frequently, but I keep trying. Maybe that's the most important thing anyone can get from these songs. Enough of my babbling. On with the interview.

I'm embarrassed to say this, but the new album sat in its envelope for a week before I opened it.

Then one night, I was really depressed and I opened it and realized what was in it.

Dave: Your lesson has been learned. Open your mail.

Yeah. I've been thinking about getting a tattoo based on "Burning Heart."

Dave: Around our song?

That song really hit home. The entire album seems like my life right now, but that song really hit just because of a lot of the things I was getting out of it - "Oh lonely boy, what you gonna do?" "I'm looking forward to not looking back."

Dave: Yeah, yeah. There's thoughts that you try and escape from that you can never escape from. So you were thinking about getting those words?

Actually, I designed one. I wanted two bands of barbed wire, then in between them, the outline of a heart with flames around it, the

DBL downward arrow, and then under that, "I'm looking forward to not looking back."

Dave: Wow. That's a great tattoo. That would be really good if you can get a good designer to find the right images that you want to do it. That would be really beautiful.

I heard that song and I've been thinking about it for the best part of two months and the design hasn't changed. That indicates to me that I need to think seriously about it.

Dave: Yeah. That's what happened to me with my first tattoo. Would that be your first tattoo?

Yeah. Well, my first tattoo was the fist with the X behind it. I really thought about that for a long time and I made sure that it was something that years and years later, and I'm certainly not straight edge by the definition that I used to hold, would still mean a lot to me. It's still a beautiful tattoo that represents a time in my life that was really important. That's a really good

DOWN BY LAW

thing. If you think about it a long time and have the image in your head a long time, that's a good indication.

Hanging on a second, there's a plane flying overhead.

Dave: Yeah, I can hear it.

You remember that X song, "4th of July"?

Dave: No. To be honest, I was never much of a knowledgeable person about X. I know, it's kind of surprising to a lot of California people, but they weren't that huge on the East Coast. When they were really popular in L.A., they weren't as popular. It was more of a hardcore scene on the East Coast, bands like Minor Threat and things like that. I think the Adolescents and the Circle Jerks were always kind of bigger than X in D.C. when I was growing up.

The only reason I even mentioned that is because that song basically describes where I live - "On the stairs I smoke a cigarette alone/Mexican kids off shooting fireworks below."

Dave: Oh wow.

It's cool because there's this kid named Alejandro and a friend of mine and I taught him how to spike a football and say "punk."

Dave: Oh, that's excellent.

He's off to a good start. He's five years old and he can say punk.

Dave: That's very good. Madeline, my oldest daughter, she really loves Down By Law, the Go-gos and Oasis, so I figure she's doing pretty well for being two years old.

And as Meatloaf once sang, "Two out of three ain't bad."

Dave: That's right. Who didn't you like in that trilogy?

I'm not fond of Oasis.

Dave: Most people I know whose opinions I respect don't like them, but I really like them.

When I first heard them, I thought it was really catchy pop but the words don't mean anything and so for a long time, I kept saying "I really like their music and their look, but I just don't, because I'm fully into the cult of Mod, identify with their lyrics." Their lyrics, in a lot of cases, are nonsensical but as I got into them more and as I kind of listened to their lyrics more, what they do with their words, and I read an interview with Noel Gallagher in which he said "My lyrics are absolute shite," but yet he's writing these words, so what is it about it that makes him write these words? I re-read the lyrics and what they have is beautiful imagery, like "Champagne supernova" which is a hit, but that image doesn't really mean anything, it's

not really an allegory for anything although maybe they think it is, but it's a beautiful image. It's a beautiful use of words. They do have a lot of that in their lyrics. It's almost poetry in a non-traditional sense, like haiku or something.

And here I thought he was just talking about an acid trip.

Dave: Yeah, maybe that's what it was, but to me I didn't understand what it was about, but the more I thought about it, it almost didn't matter what it was about. It was just this image of a champagne supernova and what that instantly conjures up in your head. A lot of their songs are like that. There are a lot of things about them that have grown on me, once Madeline decided she liked them.

How's the young one doing?

Dave: The little baby? Abigail is very good. She's great actually. We just moved back to Virginia, I'm here in L.A. right now to do the video and a press day and stuff, but the babies are great. I think they've missed their friends, especially Madeline, but they're both happy. They like it there.

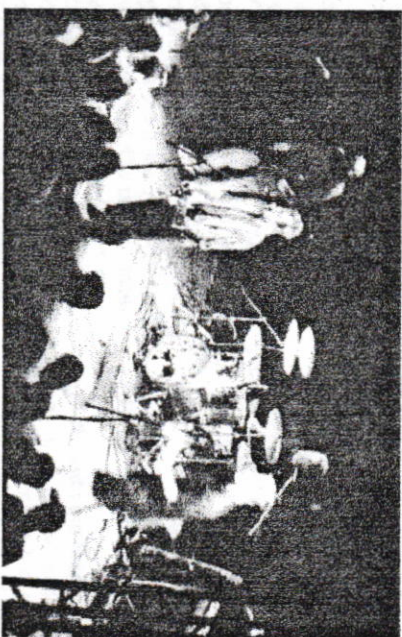
So what prompted the move? You've been in L.A. for almost 10 years.

Dave: It was like 8 or 9 years, yeah. Basically, when we were a young couple, I mean, we're still a young couple by comparison, but when we were a brand new young couple living in L.A. and going to shows or going to restaurants or theaters all the time, that was really great. I still love L.A. a lot, it's really my second home but it was never my first home. When people say, "Where are you from?", the first thing that comes off my tongue is Virginia. As you know, on side 4 of "All Scratched Up," I wrote a song called "Green Hills of Virginia," because I've never really lost sight of that. I'm still a fanatical Redskins fan, I still hate Marion Barry. All these thoughts about Virginia and D.C. are part of me. It's where I grew up, it's what I love, so I've always really dreamed of going back there someday and I thought it would be after I hung up my guitar and whatever, but it turns out that once we had children, it just seemed like the right thing to do. Where we live now, I look out my back porch and there's woods behind us.

Where we lived in South Pasadena was great, but we looked out and saw another house. Here I look at my backyard and there's woods and that's what I grew up with. I was never a concrete and steel kind of guy. I was a suburban country boy. I was somewhat of a city boy because I was in D.C. all the time, but I really have a strong

musical, because I derive personal messages from the political songs, and political messages from the personal songs, and it once again hammers home the point that the personal is political and the political is intensely personal.

Dave: Oh, man. I wish that every fan could read that because that pretty much sums up how I feel about my music anyway. I see bands like Crass, really political bands. To me, it's too easy to just be political. You have to view it and feel it and still love your country. I do love the United States. "USA Today" is a song about the violence in Los Angeles and other societies in America, but by no means do I have anything but total admiration for what we've done in this country throughout our history. I'm a total patriot. I really am. I don't say that in the skinhead sense, I say that in the sense of



Jefferson or Lincoln or Kennedy. What we have done overall as a society, granted, there's a thousand terrible things, but overall, America is unmatched in the world and in the history of the world with what we have for freedoms, the economic things we have accomplished. There are a lot of negatives that go along with all of these as well, but we're slowly and incrementally even improving on those. I'm an absolute patriot, but I really do take it personally when the bank robbers wearing masks are out shooting guys on the street in Los Angeles with fully automatic rifles. That's my city and my country and they're fucking it up and that bothers me and it bothers me that society lets that happen, that we live in a society where it's possible to get fully automatic guns and shoot them at the police and use human shields and stuff. I do take it personally so there is a definite personal aspect to my political writing. I think there

always will be. To me, that's what made bands like The Clash or other bands like The Jam or whoever you want to say, bands that had a bit of politics to them like the Sex Pistols. That was all viewed from their perspective - "I'm so bored with the USA." It wasn't like a direct attack on the USA, it was like "I'm so bored with it all." That's the kind of thing I try to use as my lyrical and of course personal perspectives. It's fortunate that a lot of people tend to like that stuff. It's funny that you mention The Clash because a friend of mine was over last night and I played "Guns" for him and told him to pick out The Clash riff.

Dave: Right. That's definitely a Clash tribute, that little signature part.

You know, my favorite Clash songs are always songs like "Lost in the Supermarket."

Dave: I love that song.

I think you and I talked about it before.

Dave: Yeah, we did.

It's just so unneringly scathing in its criticism of modern life, yet at the same time, it's almost a pop song, like "Every Breath You Take" was a pop song, except for the subtextual analysis and critique.

Dave: Yeah, and rage too.

Absolutely. "I came here for the special offer! A guaranteed personality." That's the kind of feeling I get off the personal songs you write, like the similarities in tone between "Factory Day" and "Lost in the Supermarket." "Factory Day" basically does the same thing. It tells a story about a person who gets stuck by modern life.

Dave: Yeah, but yet we don't ever think of that when we're at the 7-11 or wherever. One of the original choruses to that, I don't remember exactly what it was, but it had the

quite as in your face as the last two albums.

Dave: That could be right actually. I hadn't thought of that, but somebody else mentioned that they saw parallels to "Blue" and I never really did. It is still driving and I would like to think it's beautiful music, it's important, at least to me, to make my songs as beautiful as they can be, but I really believe that's an important part of our music, but at the same time, there aren't songs like "Gruesome Gary" or "Counting Crows Must Die." There's no ha ha songs. There's one hardcore song at the very end, "Self-Destruction." I really, hands down, if you ask me what are my favorite songs that I've ever done, they're on this album and maybe that is because it's more introspective and a bit more thoughtful. It's certainly more political. It's definitely a more serious record.

As a quick sidenote, and I can't believe I'm going to admit this, but I love the second Counting Crows album.

Dave: Well, I never heard it. It could be great and every man is absolutely entitled to his opinion.

I figure at this point in time, you like Oasis, I can like Counting Crows.

Dave: Oh, I don't know. That's a pretty big jump, don't you think? It just seemed like every song fit my life or something that was going on at the time.

Dave: Well, I'm reading a book about Thomas Jefferson and I just opened to a page and a quote which says, "Opinion and the just maintenance of it shall never be a crime in my view, nor bring injury on the individual." I.e., think what the fuck you want. That's not too far from Milton's marketplace of ideas.

Dave: Yeah, yeah, "and without it, we shall cease to thrive." That's very true.

That's one of the reasons I like talking to you. You're one of the few punk musicians I can discuss Milton and Thomas Jefferson with.

Dave: Yeah, I know. You're one of the few people I do discussions with that actually can quote me right back, so it's really nice.

Yeah. Right now I'm working through Mill's "Subjection of Women."

Dave: I don't know that one.

It's basically a treatise he wrote about his ideas on feminism and women's rights.

Dave: Not exactly popular writing in his day. Nope. He was probably right up there with Mary Wollstonecraft in terms of his popularity.

Dave: That's neat.

So getting back from the Counting Crows digression which led to Milton and Mill and Thomas Jefferson, one of the things I was getting from the album is that it's very topical. You've got "Guns of '96," "Urban Napalm," "USA Today," "Get Out," the song about Irish Independence.

Actually could that song also be loosely taken as a song about Quebec Independence?

Dave: I don't know if that song could, it could loosely be, I guess you could stretch the idea, but the real idea of "Get Out" is when I've been in Northern Ireland, which I have been twice with the band, it's incredible. Military occupation. It's unbelievable, to me, that this exists in a modern, Western society. You get to the border and there's huge guns pointed at your tour bus or van or whatever you're in and soldiers who are young kids and nervous and scared. They think anybody and everybody is out to get them and they, therefore, are out to be afraid and shoot anybody if it comes down to it. Really, we got the sense that if we dropped a pencil on the floor and reached down to pick it up that they would have opened fire. It was that grim. We saw patrols and looking to the roofs. To me, it's a total anachronism in 1997.

It sounds like Beirut.

Dave: It feels like Beirut and yet it's Ireland. It's nothing like anything that should be that way. So it's more directly about the feeling of the military occupation and that's really what it is. It is a military occupation.

So, back to the point, there are obviously a lot of topical songs, but it also seems like this album has a more personal tone even though, and correct me if I'm wrong, you seemed to be saying this album is more political than "All Scratched Up."

Dave: I think it is. Just the songs that you were just mentioning are all directly or indirectly political songs. "Guns of '96" is a song which has dual meanings. One is obviously the violence inherent in this society, but the other one was the election year. I was trying to indicate the "Guns of '96" pointing at each other, Dole and Clinton.

The man, being President Clinton, "said boy things will change this year! Boy let me tell you crystal clear! That man lives far away from here." It's not something he has to deal with. They're all fairly political songs. I was looking at songs like "No Equalizer," "Burning Heart," "Question Marks & Periods." It's one of the confusing things for me about your

love for all things green. It was just good for the babies and good for us to do it. Right, because the kids are young and they'll be more active if they grow up around trees where they can run around than if they grow up in L.A. where they can watch TV.

Dave: Exactly, although it's oppressively hot there, like L.A. does not get humid and it gets very, very humid here, but it really is a good place to raise children.

So how's fatherhood treating you?

Dave: Fatherhood is really a cool thing. I'm really glad that I did it while I'm young. Like I say, the fact that I'm listening to the Go-gos and Oasis and Down By Law and Madeline says "Da da, 'USA Today.' Da da, 'USA Today.'" That's one of her favorite songs on the album. The fact that she's saying that and I think that that's cool means that I'm raising her, hopefully, to have a sense of experimentation. I don't want to force her to become a punk rock listener if she doesn't want to be, but I at least want to be presenting her with all kinds of things her whole life so she grows up with a good imagination and a good sense of all things. We also play a lot of classical music around her so she'll have that background too, but it's a really fun thing. I really dig it. I recommend it highly if you want to do it. I think I'll wait a few years for that one.

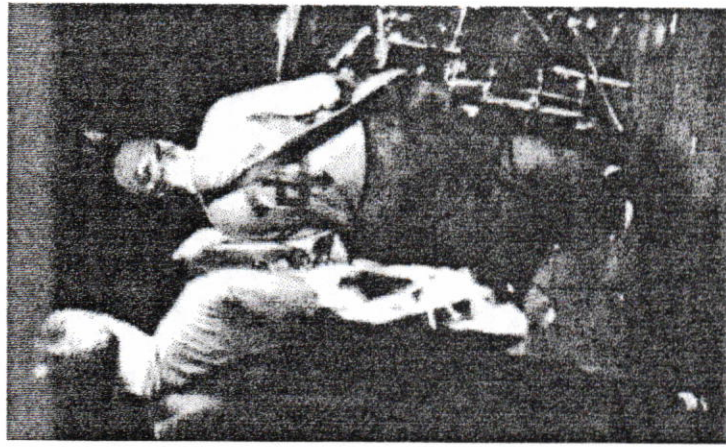
Dave: Yeah, you have to really be ready. One of the reasons that I was always very strongly pro-choice is I knew people that got pregnant and had babies when they didn't want them and they didn't have the options in life that they wanted because they had new responsibilities and the kids didn't have as good of a time as they could have. I always just said wait until you're ready. Maybe start out with a dog and see how that goes, because a dog doesn't require half or a tenth of the care as a child.

Dogs are pretty self-sufficient as long as you throw some food out.

Dave: And let them go outside. But children, especially little babies, are 24/7. It's a really fun time.

You know, that brings up a question, because as you were talking about how great it was, I was wondering what you're going to do when, at 15, Madeline wants to get a tattoo?

Dave: I'll say "We're not going to discuss it, go back to your room and finish your algebra homework." No, I don't know. Brett and I used to joke around that our kids are going to grow up and their rebellion will be to



become accountants and president of the math club and stuff and they'll listen to Top 40 or something. That will be their rebellion because of their parents because their parents come from the alternative, rebellious background of rock 'n' roll, so their own rebellion will be contrary to that, and the opposite of that is to go completely normal. Somebody was telling me that Madeline's going to come home and say, "Dad, don't play any of your guitars in front of anybody, okay? Don't embarrass me." I don't know. We'll have to see.

A friend of mine and I were talking about something similar to that the other day and he said, "Why is straight edge a rebellion? You're not smoking, you're not drinking, you're not doing drugs. You're doing exactly what your parents want!"

Dave: That's true in the sense that you are doing what your parents want, but the point that it's a rebellion against is really against your immediate world and your peers. For me, when we were starting this whole thing, and we weren't aware that we were starting anything, it was this universal thing where people were coming to the realization that there was really heavy peer pressure in junior high and high school to smoke pot and drink a lot. It was messing up kids already. I

came back from France for 8th grade and some of my best friends from elementary school were total stoners. I'm sure that's the way I would have gone if I hadn't had the opportunity to travel and I came back and for me, it was instant. I was like, "Ewww!" I saw kids smoking pot before class in 9th grade, before school at like 8 in the morning, just taking up and it was something I never wanted any part of. I don't think pot is a great evil at all. I think for people who want to smoke pot, it's great, but for me, as I saw so many people who were abusing it at such an early age, it was really easy for me to say that wasn't the road I was going to take. I think it's a rebellion against your peers and your own immediate expectations from adult society. The trick about your parents and rebellion is to have your own head and your own political ideas, your own musical tastes and your own everything else. Just because one aspect of your life compares to theirs doesn't mean you can't be a rebel. One of the things I came up with was that the rebellion wasn't so much about abstention as it was keeping your head clear in a society that wanted you to be doped up so you wouldn't see what was going on.

Dave: That is extremely perceptive. I would agree with that, and in addition, continuing on that line of thought, the idea was always to keep your head clear to accomplish something. The point of the song "Straight Edge" is "I'm a person just like you! But I've got better things to do." The point was to keep your straight edge, to keep your head clear so that you can accomplish things and that's why I kind of broke with a lot of the more militant straight edge people of the last 5 or 6 or 8 years. They are now saying, "We're straight edge." To me, it was always, "Okay, so fucking what?" That's not it. That's nothing. So you're straight edge. That doesn't mean anything. The point is to be clear-headed and achieve something and then yes, do rebel. Write a book, or read a book or whatever. Don't just say, "Okay, I'm

straight edge. I'm going to wear a backpack and listen to Earth Crisis and all is well."

That means absolutely nothing. I know plenty of people who drink and smoke and do every other thing and they're amazing conversationalists and funny and creative people, and I know plenty of straight edgers who are straight edge but don't accomplish anything. As with all things, you have to judge the individual by his or her own actions, but it's not enough just to be straight edge.

It's sad in a way because I've had a lot of friends over the years who have stepped away from straight edge and when they have, they've usually gone to the opposite extreme.

Dave: That definitely does happen. I've seen it too. It happened with a lot of people. I think the reason for that is that, to use the term, they go off the edge and all of a sudden, they're like a kid in the candy store. "Oh, I kind of like beer, maybe I'll like whiskey. I kind of like whiskey, maybe I'll smoke pot." The problem I see with straight edge is that I don't really see anyone like Ian Mackaye around anymore, I don't see people like you around anymore, the people who pioneered it and had that ideal. These days, it seems like being straight edge has more to do with how many slogans you know.

Dave: I completely agree with that and it is so sad. It was always a part of punk rock. That was the whole point of it. Straight edge and punk rock went hand in hand. You were straight edge because you were punk rock and thought differently and acted differently and did different things with your life. Now it's just do the slogans, wear the backpack, buy the right records, go home and don't do anything. Again, we're generalizing because there are plenty of straight edge people who are still smart and creative and productive and using their heads, and the ideal for straight edge has never been bad. It's just what people do with it. I sort of had to find the edge to get back

on track. For the first part of this year, I don't think there was a week that went by when I wasn't drunk at least once.

Dave: Well, people go through those phases and the trick is to be able to get off it. The trick is to be able to do that and not go over the edge, over the cliff.

I realized how much money I was spending on it and I wondered why I wasn't doing something productive, like putting out another issue of the zine.

Dave: You know, I meant to tell you, you remember the issue you did that had Pansy Division in it and had the pink cover?

Caroline was reading it, it was next to the bed on her nightstand, and Madeline came in, this was when Madeline was about one and just learning to walk, she really latched on to the pink cover and that was her favorite thing. She'd go and she'd pull it and look through it and gnaw on it and every other thing, so that issue is one of the most long-lasting things in the Smalley bedroom. Not only was it read by us, it was consumed by our daughter.

That makes me so happy. That literally makes my day. Dave: Oh, good. It was a very good thing. And the good thing is that I got to read it before it was slobbered on. Well, I'm doing it for the kids anyway. Dave: Exactly. I wasn't specifying what age.

Dave: Exactly. That's right. You're doing it for the kids, no matter what age. One of the things that I started wondering about as I started thinking about getting this tattoo was what tattoos you had gotten since the last time we talked. You had just gotten the one of your guitar then.

Dave: I'm trying to think if that was the last one. I forgot them sometimes because they're such a part of me that I just presume they're there. Did I have the fleur de lis on my back? The big symbol of France? I have it on my back shoulder. I think that was after actually, I think that was the last one I got. I

got it when I was in Montreal. I lived in France as a boy and my parents live there now and Down By Law does extremely well in Quebec and Montreal, partly because I speak French I think, and they really respect that, but I really strongly support the independence movement there and I just went up there and I decided that I wanted to get it. That was unlike the one I was talking about with you and how most of them really should be. I had been thinking about it for a little while but not for too long and I was there and the promoter there knew someone who wanted to do it and who was a great tattooist. All the things were right there and I said let's do it. I went to the promoter's house, where I was staying, and got tattooed in the kitchen.

So do you think the Quebecois are ever going to get independence?

Dave: I don't know. It's going to be hard. My theory about it is that any time that a majority of people want their independence, any time that happens, it should be done if we live in a truly free society and I hope it's also true for the South and it's not just because I'm from Virginia. I was pro-South growing up and the reason was never about slavery or anything disgusting like that, but because if you are really a free society, if you are really as free as you say you are, then let the people decide and if the majority of the people in a place decide they want to leave, they should be allowed to do that. In Quebec, they have their own language, they have their own culture, their own history and they have voted in referendums that they want to be separate. They haven't quite won yet, but if it does, they should be allowed to leave.

Now, one of the things that grabbed me about "Last of that Sharpshooters" was that it seems a little more reflective than "All Scratched Up," almost like it's more of a throwback to "Blue" in the tone, in the way the songs are structured. With the exception of songs like "No Equalizer" and "Guns of '96," it's not

"I DON'T WANT A PERFECT WORLD BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE A REALLY BORING PLACE. THERE WOULDN'T BE ANY REBELLION LEFT, THERE WOULDN'T BE ANY CHALLENGES LEFT,

THERE WOULDN'T BE ANY MOUNTAINS TO CLIMB."

DAVE SMALLEY